Framing global poverty

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There is no such thing as public opinion. There is only published opinion.

Winston Churchill
Writing a dissertation as an external PhD candidate starts with a professor who believes in your plan. For me, that professor was Paul Hoebink. We had known each other for quite a few years when we met at a seminar in Den Bosch in May 2011. Over a drink I casually asked him about his universities’ policy regarding external PhD students. Paul smiled and replied: ‘Why don’t you come by?’ I did not need to bring more than one page with my outline to get the green light.

The next crucial thing is to have a co-promoter who is enthusiastic and supportive – and, not unimportantly, who is a pleasant person to work with. I was lucky to have two of them. Lau Schulpen welcomed everything I wrote with unmatched enthusiasm. ‘Looks good! You have written a nice piece!’ Whenever I submitted a draft, he assured me that I had written a nice piece – and then handed back the draft filled with comments from front to back. However, when reading his feedback, it always struck me that he had mercilessly ticked off the passages that I subconsciously knew were not yet okay.

My second co-promotor was Baldwin van Gorp, whom I first met in 2012 after sending him a random email. Baldwin dared to enter a promotion process with a virtually unknown person - which could have turned out to be less fortunate. Over the years, Baldwin fed my drafts with an endless flow of new ideas and suggestions. His creativity often proved invaluable; whenever I got stuck with my analysis, Baldwin found a way out.

Having provided yourself with good supervisors, the next step is to find material to study. Many NGOs helpfully sent me campaign material, brochures, flyers and newsletters. Partos and 11.11.11 assisted me to get in touch with them. At a later stage, I needed insight from reporters and foreign correspondents. Dozens of journalists from the Dutch print media volunteered to participate in my survey.

Collecting data is one thing, analysing the content is yet another one. The hard work of coding over a thousand texts, photos and videos was mostly done by my research assistants, who spent many hours splattering over lengthy questionnaires. A big round of applause for Kheta Chittick, Josh Christian, Pascal Dekkers, Djana Djordjevic, Anne Hoogerbrugge, Jade Peters, Mark Schönhage, Laura van Tilborg and Dick Witte. Their contribution would not have been feasible without financial support from Kaleidos Research and in
kind support from Partos. Christine Carabain of Kaleidos gave valuable feedback on the research design and the popular version of my research.

Another challenge was the statistical analysis of the data, as my knowledge of statistics had gone downhill pretty much over time. It was professionally polished up and complemented by Pieter van Groenestijn. Throughout the process, Saskia Bergen was the devoted and energetic organiser and trouble-shooter who made sure that library connections worked, rooms were booked and documents sent.

Research findings should not stay in the ivory science tower. Over the years, many Dutch and Flemish NGOs invited me to talk about my findings and enriched me with valuable feedback from the field. The Wilde Ganzen team deserves a special mention. My research paralleled their own ‘Reframing the Message’ programme, coordinated by Natasja Insing. Soon after the first results came out, Wilde Ganzen organised a staff meeting to ponder the frames I had found. On a number of occasions they offered me a stage for my story, both in the Netherlands and in Denmark.

Writing a dissertation can be a solitary exercise – and it is important that your mind be regularly refreshed. For that purpose, I had my ‘think tank’ with Mark van Luijk, Judith Madigan, Edith Tulp and Wim Stroecken – all communication professionals with an interest in poverty framing. Our meetings were always less organised and structured than we wanted, and this did not really improve over time. I hope my promotion will not be the end of our enjoyable times together.

The last paragraph is for my loved ones at home. Ralf has been a soundboard, energiser, tranquiliser and – for some time – the sole breadwinner of the family, for which I am very grateful. During this PhD project, David and Emma struggled through secondary school and they have promised to read this work one day. Perhaps. My final word is for family, friends and everyone else who patiently kept asking how my research was going – and, over the past three years or so, when it would be finished.

One night in November 1999, I received an unexpected call from my Malawian friend Grace Phiri. The line cracked and she cried so hard that it took minutes before I understood what she said. Her husband Boniface had passed away that morning at the Queen Elisabeth Hospital in Blantyre. He was 39 years old and had been admitted with meningitis just the day before. We did not say the word, but we both knew what this meant. The AIDS epidemic was raging through Africa. Affordable medicines were not available. Boniface died even before the diagnosis was made.

Three years later, during a holiday in the Netherlands, Grace gathered the courage to undergo a test herself. The unfortunate outcome was not unexpected, but this time we had hope; Malawi had just begun to roll out a comprehensive anti-AIDS programme. With money from the WHO and the Global Fund, test centres were set up, health workers trained and free drugs distributed. An HIV infection was no longer a death sentence. In the 10 years from 2004, the number of AIDS deaths in Malawi was cut in half and the number of new infections decreased by three-quarters. Grace has been taking antiretroviral drugs for 14 years now and lives without significant health problems. She married again, fosters two children, runs her own business and earned a certificate in social work.

Nevertheless, while the AIDS-epidemic in Africa was retreating, support for development cooperation began to dwindle in the Netherlands. Critical books, such as Dead Aid by Dambisa Moyo, attracted a lot of attention. Outspoken MPs like Arend-Jan Boekestijn got plenty of space in the media to argue that foreign aid was meaningless. A comprehensive report by the WRR, the scientific council for government policy, dismissed investments in healthcare in developing countries as ‘palliative’ types of aid. Consecutive surveys of NCDO and the EU revealed weakening public support; people maintained that it was important to help the poor, but they increasingly doubted whether it was making any difference. In 2012, when development cooperation was prominently on the agenda in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, there was no political or public support for keeping up the budget.

This fascinated and worried me. While developing countries made impressive improvements, the Dutch public seemed increasingly convinced that investing in international cooperation was pointless. How could that happen?
Observing this discrepancy between hopeful developments in Africa and the sour public mood in my country led to the initial question for this research: What, if anything, do the media have to do with this? It is a question that not only interests me as a researcher and a journalist, but is also a question that affects me personally; without aid-funded healthcare in Malawi, which would not exist without public and political support in the West, a number of my Malawian friends would probably not be alive today.

One could conclude that I simply want the media to write in favour of development aid. But that is not the point. It is not the role of the media to support international aid – or anything else for that matter. But it is their role to provide their audience with an accurate view of the major trends in the developing world. I am curious to find out how they fulfil it.
1
The media and public engagement with global poverty

1.1 Public perceptions and the media

What comes to people’s minds when they hear the word ‘Africa’? Communications agency BrandOutLoud captured this in a short movie that is retrievable on YouTube (2011). In Amsterdam’s Vondelpark, unsuspecting hikers and bikers are asked about their first thoughts on ‘aid in Africa’. Immediate responses are ‘poverty and disasters’, ‘hunger bellies’, ‘starving children’, ‘hunger and thirst’, ‘helplessness’, and so on. One man jokingly pulls his wallet and gives the reporter a 10-euro note. These hikers in the park are obviously not a representative sample, but their responses are confirmed by serious investigations. For example, recent British studies (Bond, 2014; Glennie, Straw, & Wild, 2012) asked people to consider the situation in developing countries. Like those in the Vondelpark, the first things that came to their minds were poverty, hunger, starvation, malnourishment, conflicts and barren, rural African landscapes. Moreover, the poor were thereby regarded as passive and helpless with little agency to change their situation.

This raises some important questions: Where does this popular perception of poverty in developing countries come from? And what is its implication for people’s engagement with the poor? To start with the latter, it goes without saying that the awareness of misery in developing countries is a driver of public support for poverty reduction policies. A survey of the European Commission (2013) shows that 83 per cent of Europeans think that it is important to help people in developing countries and 66 per cent say that tackling poverty should be one of the main priorities of the EU. National surveys illustrate these findings. For example, a Belgian survey found that 63 per cent of people agree that ‘the gap in the world between the rich North and the poor South is unacceptable’ (Pollet, 2012a).

However, perceptions of misery and conflict have a downside as well. There is a widespread belief that there is no progress in developing countries. One of the passers-by in the Vondelpark expressed this by commenting that ‘nothing has changed since the colonial times’. When asked in a survey, 62 per cent of the British were convinced that poverty in developing countries had become worse over the last 20 years. The correct statement, that in fact it has halved, was known by only 1 per cent (Schoemaker & Papadongonas, 2016). In addition to this, ever more people voice doubts about the effectiveness of development aid and think that aid is money not well spent. Fifty-three per cent of British people agree that most financial aid to poor countries is wasted and that corruption in developing countries makes it pointless to donate (TNS, 2010, p. 28). Surveys in other European countries confirm this popular image of the lack of progress and ineffectiveness of development cooperation (Danida, 2014; Gapminder, 2014; Schoemaker & Papadongonas, 2016).

This gives rise to an interesting paradox in Europeans’ attitudes towards poverty: people think it is important to provide aid to the poor in developing countries, but they do not believe that it is making any difference (IOB, 2009). Critical voices within the development community have warned that this paradox is a serious threat to the long-term public engagement with poverty (Darnton & Kirk, 2011).

That brings us to the question of where people’s perceptions of developing countries originate. After all, most Europeans do not think about this topic in their daily lives. When asked, most people identify the news media, especially television and print media, as their primary source of information about developing countries (Bond, 2014; European Commission, 2015; Glennie et al., 2012; Pollet, 2012b).

Several studies elaborate on people’s experiences with mediatised information. By and large, people recall how the media have fed them with images of misery and disaster in developing countries throughout their lives. This is illustrated by comments such as, ‘They only tell you the doom and gloom side of things’ (DFID and BBC News, 2002, p. 8), and, ‘It’s always . . . the sob story kind of thing’ (Glennie et al., 2012, p. 21). People’s comments not only referred to the news media, but also specifically to campaigns of development organisations, such as, ‘We’re just being told to still keep passing your money through, we’re not being told of the goals that they’ve achieved’ (Glennie et al., 2012, p. 21).

The topic of this thesis is the representation of poverty in developing countries by news media and NGOs and its relationship with public engage-
ment. Poverty is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. Extreme poverty is not just the lack of income, but includes features like the shortage of food and limited access to education, healthcare and proper housing. Moreover, poverty extends to immaterial dimensions such as lack of security, social exclusion, powerlessness and deprivation of basic human rights (Narayan, 2000).

This thesis is inspired by debates about the representation of developing countries in Western society, as pointed out above. More specifically, it is inspired by the concern about the potential impact of media representations on public engagement with global poverty and development cooperation. Hence, the main objective of the study is to gain insight into the current portrayal of global poverty and development cooperation in the European media. Moreover, the study aims to understand how mediatized poverty representations arise. Finally, it is interested in the relation between those representations and public perceptions of global poverty. The remainder of this opening chapter provides a general introduction to the theme and the societal and academic relevance of the study. It discusses the theory and method and outlines the structure of the book.

1.2 The representation of global poverty in the West

The debate about the negative effects of poverty representations in the media has been ongoing since the 1970s, when starving children made their entrance in news photos and fundraising material from international development organisations (NGOs). In 1981, the British magazine New Internationalist warned against the impact of such images on the audience (Lissner, 1981), stating that using them was both unethical and counter-productive in the long run. The debate peaked after the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 with its emotional imagery of disaster victims (Dogra, 2012). In 1989, the General Assembly of European NGOs responded by adopting a Code of Conduct, which encouraged NGOs to choose images and messages that respected human dignity and to avoid sensationalist simplicist messages (Concord, 2012). Nevertheless, criticisms persist and both news media and NGOs are held responsible for their contribution to biased audience perceptions of developing countries.

The main issue in this discussion is the use of images of suffering people, with ‘hunger bellies’ and ‘flies in their eyes’, especially from Africa, which emphasise the misery and helplessness of people in developing countries. British researchers believe that repeated use of such stereotypes, with a call for donations, eventually gives the public the feeling that ‘it has not helped at all’, thereby eroding the support for development aid (Bond, 2014; Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Dogra, 2012). Similar criticism has been voiced to journalists, photographers and producers of television programmes. With a one-sided emphasis on disaster and misery, they allegedly paint a distorted picture of the daily reality in developing countries, eventually undermining the involvement of the public (DFID and BBC News, 2002; Lugo-Ocando, 2015).

The current discussion about the representation of poverty in developing countries cannot be separated from historical processes. Throughout the centuries, people from Africa, Asia and Latin America have been represented as Europe’s ‘others’ (Dogra, 2012). Central to this ‘otherness’ was the inferiority and primitiveness of the non-Western world as opposed to the civilised and rational Western world. Nederveen Pieterse (1990) described how this primitive ‘other’ could be stereotyped as a ‘bon sauvage’ – noble but good, as in the novel Uncle Tom. However, he could also take the shape of a stereotypical dangerous ‘wild savage’, as in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. Such stereotypical portrayals of a primitive and backward ‘non-Western world’ fostered the emergence of a colonial discourse, which served to legitimise slavery, imperialism and colonialism (e.g., Anand, 2007; Dogra, 2012; Said, 1978).

It is argued that colonial discourse is still pervasive both in Western media representations and in people’s perceptions of developing countries (e.g., Dogra, 2012; Manzo, 2008; Wekker, 2016). For example, Dogra (2012) argues that British NGO-messages still emphasise the difference between the rural and backward ‘majority world’ (her epithet for ‘developing countries’) and the urban, modern and prosperous Europe. However, it is questionable whether this discourse is all-important in current media representations. After all, the end of the colonial era transformed the relation between the Western and non-Western world, and this subsequently influenced academic and political debates. They were focused, among other things, on the poverty issue and the question of how the West should relate to it. For example, dependency-school thinkers such as Cardoso and Frank promoted a narrative that defined poverty as the result of the denial of social and economic rights, and the exploitation of poor areas by wealthy areas. Economist Jeffrey Sachs (2005) popularised the narrative of the ‘poverty trap’, which states that people are poor because they are captured in a vicious circle of hunger, disease and illiteracy. These ideas were reflected in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.
(MDGs), which were widely adopted by international development NGOs. The successor of these goals, the Sustainable Development Agenda, was inspired, among other things, by a sustainability narrative, which emphasises the importance of mitigating climate change to end poverty and to ensure peace and prosperity for all (Sachs, 2012; United Nations, 2016).

In conclusion, successive narratives have informed discussions among academics, politicians, policy makers and NGOs. Hence, this thesis assumes that different narratives drive the current public debate, with different reasoning about the origin of and solution to poverty and the role of the Western world.

1.3 Central research question

Societal relevance

The objective of this research is to gain understanding of poverty representations and their connection with people’s engagement with global poverty. To begin with, this is important for citizens in the developing and developed world. The lives of people in developing countries may be affected by policies from Western governments and NGOs, which may have been informed by the popular discourse. Moreover, people in developing countries can feel the impact of decisions from Western individuals, who may be motivated to donate to charities or not to donate, based on what they see or read in the media. Also, they may feel the influence in encounters with Westerners, who may have preconceptions of people in the developing world as ‘primitive and backward’, in response to media images.

Second, understanding the representation of poverty in the Western media is relevant for those who are engaged in poverty reduction, notably international development organisations. Their work may be impacted by news media coverage of issues in developing countries. News about natural disasters, for example, may raise public awareness that help (from NGOs) is needed. Next to this, the work of NGOs may be the subject of media coverage. This happens, for example, in opinion articles that question the effectiveness of development aid. Finally, NGOs themselves contribute to the imaging of poverty in the media, for example, through emergency appeals. NGOs are increasingly aware of the danger to disengage the audience with negative imagery, and many are searching for new narratives to engage or re-engage the public (see for example Bond, 2015; Lijfering, 2014).

Third, understanding poverty representations is important for journalists, politicians, policymakers and other communicators. Like NGOs, they contribute to the portrayal of poverty by disseminating information about the topic in the public sphere. This is especially true for journalists, who inform and influence the public debate with newspaper articles, documentaries and news items. Their contribution not only has an effect on public awareness, but it may also influence political decision-making and the policy agenda of governments and NGOs (Van Gorp, 2010; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009).

Given the societal relevance of the issue, it is important for NGOs, policymakers, media workers and citizens to have a nuanced picture of the representation of global poverty and development cooperation in the news media. Moreover, it is important to know how these representations come about and how they are related to public perceptions. The objective of this research is, therefore, to inform various communicators, to increase their awareness, and to provide tools to reflect on their own and other people’s communications.

Gaps in the literature

Despite the intensity of the discussion on poverty representations in Europe, the literature on the nature and scope of various portrayals in the media is surprisingly thin. As stated in the previous paragraph, the discussion is mostly about the drawbacks of using victim imagery, especially by NGOs, and notably, of people in Africa. According to the literature, this reinforces harmful stereotypes and colonial ideas. However, recent studies suggest that this claim is hardly substantiated and has in fact become a myth (Nothias, 2016; Scott, 2017).

Current studies are limited for several reasons. First, few of them provide quantitative empirical data. They base their argument on elaborate descriptions rather than providing insight into the extent of various representations (e.g., Cohen, 2001; Kennedy, 2009; Manzo, 2008). An exception is a textual analysis by Nothias (2016) of 282 articles on Africa in the British and French press. He concluded that claims of the media’s reproduction of stereotypical representations are not empirically supported. Another exception is Dogra’s study of representations of global poverty (2012), which was based on a content analysis of 88 messages of British NGOs in newspapers and 7,000 to 8,000 still images in other formats from 2005/2006. She found, for example, that women and children in rural settings are overrepresented. However, as in
other studies, the emphasis in her study was not on quantifying the characteristics of the images, but on explaining their deeper meaning.

Second, many studies are confined to the representation of specific countries or specific news events (e.g., Alam, 2007; Campbell, 2007; Kennedy, 2009; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Manzo, 2008). For example, Campbell (2007) investigated visuals from the famine in the Sahel and Lugo-Ocando (2015) and studied the stereotyping of Africa in the news about Nigeria. Such case studies are not generalisable to the media representation of global poverty in a broad sense. Third, existing studies are either confined to NGOs or to the news media, and do not pay attention to the specific roles of and differences between these various senders. Finally, most studies are based on data from the British media (e.g., Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Dogra, 2012; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). It is not clear whether their findings are generalisable to other countries.

The limited scope also applies to investigations into public perceptions of poverty. Many European countries, and the European Union, regularly assess people’s opinion on development issues. However, the emphasis in these studies is on public support for government spending on development aid (e.g., Bond, 2014; European Commission, 2011; Pollet, 2012a). People’s thoughts about development issues in a broader sense are not systematically investigated. Likewise, little is known about the connections between public perceptions and media representations. An exception is an investigation by Bond (2014) of 2,000 articles on the topic in the British press between July 2011 and June 2013. During that same period, a group of 26 people was asked to report on their media experiences and thoughts about global poverty. The researchers found a clear link between media coverage and the group’s perceptions of the issue.

A final remark concerns the literature on the production of poverty representations by journalists and NGOs. The scarce literature on this topic is skewed towards the role of NGOs (e.g., Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Dogra, 2012; Kennedy, 2009; Manzo, 2008). In addition, Lugo-Ocando (2015) explored journalism’s failure to cover poverty worldwide. What stands out in these studies is that they mainly analyse the content of media messages and then draw conclusions about their creation. Hardly anything is asked to the actual producers, such as journalists and communication officers from NGOs. An exception is a study of Dogra (2012), who based her chapter on NGOs’ perspectives on eight interviews with staff members from NGOs.

Central research question and demarcation of the research

There is a need for a more comprehensive overview of portrayals of global poverty in the European news media and their relationship with the perceptions of audiences. The following central research question is formulated:

**RQ What stories about global poverty are narrated in Europe?**

Three countries serve as case studies in this research: the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium. Currently, studies based on British data are overrepresented in the literature (e.g., Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Dogra, 2012; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). Including data from different countries gives an impression of the diversity of poverty representations within Europe. However, to build on existing literature, the UK is one of the selected countries. The country choice is also motivated by presumed differences between these countries regarding media culture and poverty representation. The media culture in the Anglo-Saxon UK differs from that in the continental Netherlands and Flanders (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); in the UK, the market share of tabloid newspapers, with sensational stories to arouse the audience, is larger than in continental Europe. Hence, this could result in differences in the portrayal of global poverty in the media, with respect to dramatic victim imagery, for example. A final motivation for the country selection concerns the language. Because the investigation of media representations is a highly language sensitive endeavour, the choice of the countries is confined to languages that are spoken fluently by the researchers, which – besides English – is Dutch. Consequently, the Belgian investigation is limited to data from Flanders, which is its Dutch-speaking part.

Next to this, the study focuses on both news media and NGOs. This choice is motivated by the fact that, as explained in the previous paragraphs, people identify both news media and NGOs as important sources of information about developing countries. Given that global poverty is in ‘the outer sphere’ of most people’s interests, very few actively seek out information on the topic; the majority retrieve their knowledge rather passively through mass media sources (Intermedia, 2012; Pollet, 2012b). Hence, to make a connection between news media representations and audience perceptions, this study focuses on messages in the mainstream media that people more or less spontaneously encounter. Consequently, messages that people must actively
seek out are omitted. For example, NGOs’ emergency appeals on television are investigated, but their websites and newsletters are not.

Finally, regarding the news media, this research is limited to newspapers. At the time of the study, print media were identified as the second most important source of information for the average audience, after television and before the Internet (Bond, 2014; European Commission, 2015; Glennie et al., 2012; Pollet, 2012b). The choice for newspapers over television was motivated by practical considerations; investigating moving television images is much more complicated and time-consuming than investigating written texts (e.g., Bell, 2001; Van Leeuwen, 2001). Hence, an advantage of studying newspaper articles is that a much larger number of news items from a given period can be analysed. Nevertheless, this choice somewhat limits the scope of the study, since it is not certain whether representations in print media are similar to those on television.

The purpose of the selection of newspapers was to ensure a good reflection of the media landscape in each of the countries. In the Netherlands, for example, the largest regional newspapers from the north, south, east and west of the country were included. Moreover, in each country, a mix of large ‘quality’ or ‘broadsheet’ and ‘tabloid’ or ‘popular’ newspapers was selected.

1.4 Theoretical framework: the framing concept

This research uses framing theories and methods as a tool to investigate the representation of poverty worldwide. Framing is best explained by means of an example. On 20 July 2011, De Telegraaf, a Dutch daily, published a horrifying account of Somalian refugees on their way to a Kenyan refugee camp (‘Dit is een tragedie’ ['This is a tragedy'], 2011). They arrived hungry and dehydrated, having lost their possessions, livestock and children. The next month, the newspaper featured another story of the events in Somalia. This article recounted how the Islamist Al Shabaab militia thwarted food aid to hungry regions and obstructed a political solution to end the emergence of the famine (Mikkers, 2011). Such diverging portrayals of issues are examples of different framings. While both journalists covered the famine in the Horn of Africa, they made totally different choices in the information they displayed and the aspects they emphasised. While the first author focused on the fate of the victims of the famine, the second highlighted the role of local leaders in the emergence and continuation of the crisis. Readers of story one may have been triggered to regard the famine as a humanitarian crisis and to be supportive of emergency aid for the victims. By contrast, readers of the second story may have been prompted to believe that emergency aid will not do any good and their donations would be a waste of money.

Framing is a suitable concept for this thesis for various reasons. First, within communication studies, framing theories are widely used to study the nature and variance of mediated messages and their potential influence on the audience. Hence, framing theories are a means to investigate various poverty representations and describe them on a meta level. Further, it is possible to quantitatively measure the presence of various frames in communicating texts and to determine which representations dominate. Moreover, frames are not only embedded in communicating texts, such as news articles or NGO- advertisements. They also manifest themselves in the minds of those on the sending and receiving side of the communication process, such as journalists and readers (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010). Hence, framing approaches make it possible to connect frames in the media to perceptions of journalists and their audiences.

The current framing study is embedded in a social constructionism paradigm. Social constructionism assumes that we develop knowledge about the world in interaction with other people; there is not just an objective reality, but also a belief about the social and political reality that we create together. Language and imagery, for example, through media representations, play an important role in this interactive reality-construction (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Scheufele, 1999). An example of such study is an investigation by Van Gorp and Van der Goot (2012) into sustainable food and agriculture. They reconstructed how different stakeholders selected elements of reality to advance their own version of the essence of the sustainability issue, of the causes of the problems and of the remedies required. It follows that framing is a social process in which different communicators contribute to the construction of meaning on an issue. In the same vein, this thesis argues that various representations of global poverty are a result of a social process of meaning construction.

Defining frames and framing

Sociologist Todd Gitlin (1980, p. 6) defined frames as ‘little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters’. According to him, media frames organise the world both for journalists who report it and the audience who relies on their report. Gitlin’s conceptualisation is part of a larger family
of framing definitions within the constructionist paradigm, all of which emphasise two features of frames: frames define what is at issue, and frames attribute meaning to the world around us. Gamson and Modigliani (1987, p. 143), for example, defined a frame as ‘a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding script of events’. Along the same line, Reese (2001, p.5) characterised frames as ‘organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world’.

These types of conceptualisations are important to understand the essence of frames. However, a critique is that they lack guidelines for operationalisation (Matthes, 2009). For instance, how should we identify or measure ‘little tacit theories’ or ‘meaning’? Therefore, this study complements the broad definition with more specific framing concepts that are better suited for conducting empirical framing analysis.

Political scientist Robert Entman, who identified the functions of framing in a communication process, presented a useful conceptualisation. According to him (1993, p. 52, italics in original), ‘to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation’. In sum, framing is about defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgements and/or suggesting remedies.

These functions of framing help to distinguish the various components of a frame. A frame about global poverty, for example, should tell something about the essence of the issue, its causes, its potential solutions and the moral values involved. A text does not necessarily expose each of these functions. According to Entman (1993, p. 52), ‘A single sentence in a text may perform one or more of these framing functions, although many sentences may not perform any of them. And a frame in any particular text may not necessarily include all four functions’.

The question that follows is how different frames can be detected and recognised in a communication process. As maintained by Entman (1993, p. 52) and Gamson and Modigliani (1989, p. 2), frames manifest themselves through features such as keywords, visual and stereotyped images, catchphrases, moral appeals, symbolic devices and sentences that reinforce facts or judgements. These elements are clustered; we encounter them not as individual items, but as ‘interpretative packages’ (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2). Moreover, Entman emphasises the importance of selection and salience in a communication process; some bits of information are highlighted, and made more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences.

In conclusion, detecting frames is to detect salient devices in a text, and clustering them into coherent stories that say something about the issue at stake, its causal interpretation, moral aspects and solutions. For example, a picture of an exhausted refugee, accompanied by words like ‘tragedy’, ‘suffering’, ‘draught’ and ‘hunger’, can be interpreted as the story, or frame, of ‘the innocent victim’ that needs and deserves our help.

1.5 Localising frames in a communication process

Frames are embedded in the communication process. This process can be divided into distinct phases, all of which are addressed in this thesis: frame building, frame setting and a feedback loop (see Figure 1.1). It builds on models that were previously presented by Scheufele (1999) and De Vreese (2005).

Frame building refers to factors that influence the emergence of frames, for example, in media newsrooms. In this phase, external information interacts with values, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies of individual journalists or communicators. This process is further influenced by, for example, professional norms, the type of medium, organisational pressures and pressures from politicians and elites (Reese, 2001). During this phase, the interaction between the communicator and external influences impacts the production of media content.

Subsequently, frame setting refers to the interaction between media content and the receiver – for example, the newspaper reader. In this phase, the frames that emerge from the media content interact with the prior knowledge, attitudes and values of the receiver. This may result in framing effects, both on the individual and societal level (e.g., Brewer & Gross, 2005; De Vreese, 2005; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Scheufele, 1999).

The third stage in the framing process is a feedback loop between frame setting and frame building. Scheufele (1999) refers to this phase as ‘journalists as audiences’; journalists contribute to framing in the newsroom, but they are part of the audience as well. Therefore, journalists are also impacted by frames in the news, which, in turn, impact their framing of issues and events (Scheufele, 1999). An example of such a feedback loop is the occurrence of a news wave; after a small number of media has framed an issue, other journalists and media reproduce the same frame (Scheufele, 1999; Vasterman, 2005).
Frames as part of a shared culture

The framing process outlined above suggests that frames emerge in various locations, for example, in the minds of journalists, in news articles, and in the minds of viewers and readers (see also Entman, 1993, p. 52). However, the current research builds on the social constructionist idea that frames are conceptually independent from the actual communicating text and from the minds of the individual communicator and receiver. Frames emerge in a broader social and political context and are part of a set of values, worldviews and beliefs, which are shared in the collective memory of a large group of people. Hence, frames are regarded as part of a shared culture, whereby culture is understood as a basis for creating knowledge, meaning and understanding of the world (Van Gorp, 2007).

Frames manifest themselves in media texts, and both senders and receivers of media messages tap from the same reservoir of culturally embedded frames when they create or interpret a message. Individuals may choose to apply certain frames or use frames to make sense of the world around them, but they cannot change a frame. Although the framing process can be very dynamic, frames themselves change very little or gradually over time (D’Angelo, 2002; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Van Gorp, 2007).

Culturally embedded frames are rooted in commonly recognised cultural themes, such as the archetype of the victim, the value of social justice or the myth of David versus Goliath (Van Gorp, 2007, 2010). For example, if the archetype of the victim is used, poverty can be portrayed as a result of unfortunate circumstances that touch innocent people. Using the value of ‘social justice’, on the other hand, would explain poverty as a result of an unfair social and economic system, which excludes certain people from wealth and opportunities. Culturally embedded frames are generic in the sense that they are not confined to single issues. The ‘victim frame’, for example, can be used to study poverty, but also to investigate the representation of war, refugees and domestic violence. At the same time, they are specific in the sense that they have a strong capacity to describe the issue at hand with a high degree of specificity and detail.

Figure 1.1 conceptualises the interaction with the cultural stock of frames during the framing process. The rectangles refer to the locations of frames in the communication process: communicators, media texts and receivers. The arrows show the stages of the process: frame building, frame setting and the feedback loop. The oval depicts the interaction between these agents and a cultural stock of frames.

This figure serves as an analytical framework for this thesis. Chapter 2 describes a cultural stock of global poverty frames. Chapter 3 measures the frequency of the most common frames in media content. Chapter 4, in addition, maps out the frame setting process and looks at the perceptibility of poverty frames in the audience. Chapter 5, finally, concentrates on the feedback loop and the frame building process in newsrooms.

1.6 Measuring frames

Identifying frames in a communication text is not straightforward. As mentioned earlier, frames are tacit; they are not directly observable, but they manifest themselves through exemplars, images, narratives and so forth. Consequently, it is difficult to empirically detect and measure them in news media messages (Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Van Gorp, 2007). Research on the identification of frames, therefore, needs to make choices regarding the measurement approach and method, which will be explained in succession. The paragraph ends with a review of measurement approaches in existing poverty framing studies. They inform the design of the current study, which will be elaborated in the subsequent and final paragraph.
Inductive and deductive approaches

Over the past decades, a range of qualitative and quantitative framing measurement models has emerged (David, Atun, Fille, & Monterola, 2011; Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010). One approach to identify frames is inductive in nature; frames emerge from the material during the analysis. The researcher reads and rereads the material and looks for patterns of words and meanings in the text. An alternative approach is rather deductive, where frames are defined and operationalised prior to the investigation. The researcher determines whether particular frames are present or not present in the material.

An example of these are the five 'news frames', described by Valkenburg, Semetko, and De Vreese (1999), that are commonly found in news stories: conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, morality and economic consequences.

Both methods have their drawbacks. Inductive analysis has been criticised for being subjective and difficult to replicate. Inductively found frames may reflect the researchers' perception of an issue, consequently producing 'researcher frames' rather than generic frames (De Vreese, 2005; Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010). On the other hand, deductive framing analysis also faces problems; when using predefined frames, one could easily overlook frames that are essential for the topic at hand (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010).

Reliability and validity

In addition to the measurement approach, concerns about reliability and validity in framing research have been widely discussed (e.g., David et al., 2011; Matthes, 2009; Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010; Van Gorp, 2010). A reliable method to measure the presence of frames, for example, is the coding of manifest content; the researcher designates keywords and codes them in a text, with or without the help of a computer. However, some scholars argue that this method is less suitable for identifying implicit framing elements, as they may be hidden between the lines. What is more, this method may undervalue the significance of powerful framing elements that appear sporadically in a dataset (David et al., 2011; Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010).

An approach that can potentially yield more valid results is holistic coding, where human coders are used to detect predefined frames in a communicating text. They internalise the meaning of the frames and encode them as 'present' or 'absent'. Holistic coding allows the coder to connect different framing elements and recognise implicit meanings. He could, for example, recognise irony, which would be overlooked by a computer-assisted coding of keywords. Nevertheless, this validity may come at the expense of reliability and replicability; the opportunity to interpret is large, and there is a chance that different coders will not arrive at the same conclusions.

Several framing researchers have tried to find an optimum between validity and reliability by using human coders and codebooks. These codebooks provide guidelines of how to code the content. In the more rigid versions, framing and reasoning devices are meticulously reworked into categories and variables (e.g., Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Van Os, 2008). The coder ticks which variables are present and which variables are counted, and a cluster analysis reveals the presence of frames. This method can yield a relatively high intercoder reliability, since there is little room for interpretation. A disadvantage is that it is very time-consuming; questionnaires cover many pages, and it is hardly possible to code more than two or three frames simultaneously. Second, it can be questioned whether the sum of framing elements is a good measure for the strength of a frame in the text; one subtle reference can be very powerful. Third, because of the detailed categorisation of frame elements, coders run the risk that they no longer see the connection between the elements, letting the actual frame slip through their fingers (David et al., 2011).

Less stringent codebooks work with interpretative questions. An example is the codebook that has been used for measuring generic news frames (e.g., De Vreese, 2005). To detect a frame a coder must answer three or four questions about that frame (e.g., ‘Is there mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?’ as an indicator of the ‘economic consequences frame’). The advantage of this approach is that it is suitable for measuring multiple frames at a time. The downside is that the existing instrument is limited to predefined general ‘news frames’: the questions are not applicable to other subjects.

Nevertheless, these theoretical considerations do not unambiguously point to the ideal method of measurement of frames. For example, Koenig (2006) proposes a measurement method that combines elements of human coding and computer-assisted coding techniques. David et al. (2011) compared two forms of coder-based framing analysis for a single set of newspaper articles. One method used a stringent codebook with an extensive list of categories and variables. The other method used a holistic approach whereby (different) coders holistically identified predefined frames. The theory suggests that the stringent codebook would provide more reliable results, whereas the
holistic method would score better on validity. However, the researchers concluded that both methods yielded comparable levels of validity and reliability, although holistic coding required more rounds of training.

**Measurement in existing poverty framing studies**

Specific studies on the framing of global poverty are very scarce. This paragraph reports findings from a review of 10 framing studies, including – because of their limited number – six studies of the framing of local poverty in Belgium, the US, Canada and the UK (see Table 1.1 for an overview). The main objective is to determine whether they have resulted in a description of poverty frames that can be utilised for this research. Thereto the review identified the chosen approach (deductive, inductive or both) and the scope of the frame analysis and frame descriptions.

Most studies applied a *deductive methodology*, defining frames prior to the research. These predefined frames were sometimes derived from existing literature (Van de Velde, Van Gorp & Blow, 2004; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). In most studies, the origin of the frames was not clarified. Moreover, most studies were limited to the investigation of just two characteristics of poverty. A recurrent classification, for example, was that of poverty in terms of ‘suffering’ or ‘threat’, or the poor as ‘deserving’ or ‘underserving’ (e.g., Clawson & Trice, 2000; Redden, 2011). Van Heerde and Hudson (2009) applied ‘economic’, ‘political’ and ‘moral’ frames when investigating the coverage of development issues in British newspapers in 2005. Others distinguished between episodic and thematic framing (Hannah & Cafferty, 2006; Iyengar, 1990). An ‘episodic’ presentation of poverty emphasises human interest and personal stories. A ‘thematic’ representation emphasises larger, societal circumstances.

The review also examined the attention to the *functions of framing*, as described by Entman (1993). The most highlighted framing function was that of causal responsibility: who or what is responsible for the onset of (global) poverty? (Clawson & Trice, 2000; Hannah & Cafferty, 2006; Kim, Carvalho, & Davis, 2010). In addition, some studies looked at the responsibility of solving the poverty problem (Kim et al., 2010; Krizay, 2011; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). The studies typically categorised the answers in terms of ‘individual responsibility’ or ‘institutional or societal responsibility’. None of them looked at the full range of framing functions, as identified by Entman (1993).

In conclusion, current studies present fragmented and incomplete data about the framing of global poverty in the public debate. None of the investigations has been the result of a thorough inductive framing analysis of the global poverty-concept, validated during a deductive phase. Instead, most of them merely employed a deductive approach, using a limited number of predefined frames, and/or focusing on just one or two ‘framing functions’.

**Implications for the current research**

The current study will combine an inductive and deductive approach to identify a wide range of poverty frames and measure their presence in communicating texts. This is the best guarantee for the detection of all frames that are relevant to the topic at hand. A tight procedure will be followed to avoid the detection of mere ‘researcher frames.’ This procedure is based on Entman’s (1993) and Gamson and Modigliani’s (1989) definitions of frames and framing elements, and was previously described by Van Gorp (2007, 2010). It

### Table 1.1. Overview of poverty framing studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>topic of study</th>
<th>type of framing research</th>
<th>approach</th>
<th>framing function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullock et al. (2001)</td>
<td>Poverty in the US</td>
<td>Analysis of frames in newspapers</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darnton &amp; Kirk (2011)</td>
<td>Public perceptions of poverty</td>
<td>Deriving frames from NGO-staff</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Heerde &amp; Hudson (2009)</td>
<td>Poverty in developing countries</td>
<td>Analysis of frames in newspapers</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Causes, consequences, solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iyengar (1990)</td>
<td>Poverty in the US</td>
<td>Framing effects of TV news</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Poverty in the US</td>
<td>Analysis of frames in the news</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Causes and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krizay (2011)</td>
<td>Domestic (US) and international poverty</td>
<td>Analysis of frames in magazines</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Causes and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redden (2011)</td>
<td>Domestic poverty in Canada and the UK</td>
<td>Analysis of frames in newspapers and online content</td>
<td>Partly inductive</td>
<td>Causal responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van de Velde et al. (2004)</td>
<td>Poverty in Belgium</td>
<td>Analysis of frames in TV news</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Causal responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is explained in the next paragraph.
During the deductive phase, the study uses a holistic method for measuring frames, based on a codebook with interpretive questions. This method, which is also further described in the next section, ensures an optimum balance between reliability, validity and time investment. Moreover, it is a suitable approach for the measurement of multiple frames at a time.

1.7 Sub-questions and design of the study

Based on the above methodological approach, four sub-questions are formulated. They serve as starting points for further research in the following empirical chapters:

RQ1 Which frames are used to represent global poverty and development cooperation? (Chapter 2)

RQ2 Which frames are used most frequently in newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements in the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders? (Chapter 3)

RQ3 How does the overarching media narrative about global poverty relate to the audience narrative about global poverty in the UK? (Chapter 4)

RQ4 How do media frames come about during the production of stories on global poverty in The Netherlands? (Chapter 5)

Data collection and methods

table 1.2 gives an overview of the data that were collected for this research. The heart of the study is a frame analysis of media content regarding global poverty. It begins with an inductive analysis, based on an initial selection of 31 documents that contained a wide variety of viewpoints on global poverty and development aid (row 1). The objective of the inductive analysis was to describe a wide range of distinctive global poverty frames. This was done by detecting framing and reasoning devices in texts that are relevant to the topic. Framing devices are manifest visual and textual elements, such as words, graphs and catchphrases. Reasoning devices are underlying ideas, which form a route of causal reasoning in a message, such as, What is the problem? What are the causes and consequences? What should be done? Devices that belong together are clustered into an overarching core frame that represents the central idea of the frame. The core frame links coherent framing and reasoning devices to an overarching cultural theme, for example, the archetype of the ‘innocent victim’ or the value of ‘social justice.’ The inductive analysis is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Subsequently, the global poverty frames were validated and their frequen-
cy was measured during a deductive phase (Table 1.2, rows 2 and 3). For that purpose, a dataset was constructed with a representative sample of 876 news articles and a non-representative sample of 284 NGO-communications. An analysis of a small selection of these communications revealed which frames play a role in current messages in the media. The frequency of these frames was measured. The coding was done holistically by a team of nine research assistants, with the guidance of a codebook with interpretative questions. Chapter 3 explicates the procedure of data collection and the coding methodology. In addition, 220 Dutch media articles were collected that specifically paid attention to development organisations or development cooperation (Table 1.2, row 4). They served to analyse the employment of various global poverty frames in the debate about development cooperation (see Chapter 2).

To answer the third sub-question, it was necessary to collect additional data on the perceptions of global poverty of the media audience. For that purpose, the study used secondary data, namely existing public opinion studies from the UK (Table 1.2, row 5). Based on a qualitative content analysis of these studies, a comparison was made between general audience perceptions of global poverty and the framing of poverty in the media. This is further explained in Chapter 4.

Finally, to answer the fourth research question, primary data were collected on the perceptions of journalists from the Netherlands. For that purpose, a new dataset of news articles from Dutch print media was compiled (row 6), after which journalists were identified who regularly write about this topic. A standardised survey among 54 of them (row 7) revealed the extent to which the poverty frames matched with their personal views on the topic. In addition, they were questioned about the influences during the research and writing process that affected the framing of their stories. Subsequently, the journalist’s frame preferences were compared with the frames in their articles. The findings were further elaborated through semi-structured, qualitative interviews (row 8). Chapter 5 describes this process.

The battle of ideas about global poverty
in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Flanders

Thesis outline

The thesis consists of this general introduction, four empirical chapters that answer the sub-questions, and a final, concluding chapter. The empirical chapters are based on articles that have been submitted to or published in scientific journals and that can be read independently. Consequently, some overlap between the chapters is unavoidable.
Abstract: The purpose of this research is to uncover the manner in which newspapers and NGO-campaigns in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Flanders represent poverty in developing countries. An inductive framing analysis, based on a social constructionist approach, reveals nine frames through which this subject is portrayed. The analysis shows how these frames propagate opposing positions about global poverty and how they drive the debates about aid effectiveness and the case for aid. The study is of relevance to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), journalists, and other stakeholders who wish to increase insight into communications about global poverty and international development.

Keywords: framing, media, development organisations, global poverty, communication

2.1 Introduction

Media audiences are confronted with contradictory stories about poverty in developing countries and also the ways to end it. On 24 March 2012, de Volkskrant, a Dutch daily newspaper, published an interview with Bill Gates, who warned the Dutch government not to cut the development aid budget because, 'Every thousand dollar reduction in development cooperation results in one additional death' (De Waard, 2012, p. 15). He reinforced this plea by stating that development aid has had tremendous impact on the reduction of child mortality, the fight against malaria, and the treatment of HIV-AIDS patients. However, publicist Alphonse Muambi (2012, p. 28) strongly disagreed. In a response in the same newspaper, he reasoned that 'the problems of Africa are the African billions in European banks, and the support given to African leaders who use it to install corruption as a political system.' Instead of pleading for more aid, Muambi argued, 'Gates had better call the Pentagon with the request to stop supporting corrupt regimes in Africa.'

The example above is not given to discuss who is right. It is presented to illustrate that global poverty is a multifaceted issue with different, and sometimes conflicting, stories. Both Gates and Muambi provide different answers to questions such as: Why are poor countries poor? What should be done to end it? Who is responsible? They do not question the other's data. What makes their stories so different is their specific choice of facts, their vocabulary, their logical reasoning and the subsequent conclusions they draw from the data. Together, Gates and Muambi apply different frames to put forward their version of the truth about poverty in Africa and they use the mass media as a battleground to convince the audience of their version of the truth.

This paper aims to scrutinise the ‘battle of ideas’ about global poverty in the public debate. A central element in this battle is the process of framing: the modelling of a message through a specific choice of topics, facts, narratives, imagery and arguments (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Each frame provides a different perspective on the question of what is at stake and follows its own logical reasoning about potential causes, solutions, and responsibilities. In summary, this study aims to identify the various frames that are used to represent global poverty and to examine how they promote competing views about development cooperation.

2.2 The need to understand the framing of global poverty

This paper assumes that the manner in which global poverty is framed in the media affects the way the public comes to understand the issue. Media frames may shape opinions about aid effectiveness, for example, and influence decisions as to whether or not to donate to charities. A reader of Gates’s plea might be convinced that development aid has tremendous impact, whereas someone who has read Muambi’s response might conclude that aid will just make matters worse.

Hence, we argue that having insight into the framing of poverty is important for those engaged in poverty reduction, and this applies especially for
development organisations. NGOs are concerned about the fact that public engagement with global poverty is under pressure (Bond, 2014; Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Glennie, Straw, & Wild, 2012). In general, people think that ending global poverty is important, but they severely question the effectiveness of development cooperation. For instance, 73 per cent of the British public believe that a lot of overseas aid ends up in the pockets of corrupt officials (Black, 2014, p. 26). Hence, many NGOs are searching for new ways to change the development narrative and to engage or re-engage the public (e.g., Lijfering, 2014; Bond, 2015).

Moreover, understanding frames is important because they fuel the interaction between the public, politicians, and policy makers. Communicators can feed the discussion about global poverty with frames and are simultaneously influenced by the frames of others. Subsequently, strong and recurring frames have the potential to influence political decision-making and the policy agenda of governments and NGOs (Van Gorp, 2010; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009).

Finally, the framing process matters because it ultimately affects people who are living in extreme poverty. They are affected, for example, by political decisions about the development agenda, they are affected by the policy changes of NGOs, and they are affected by decisions of individuals who have come to believe, based on what they hear or read in the media, that it is, or is not, a good idea to support a development project.

Given the societal relevance of the issue, it is important for NGOs and other stakeholders to have an accurate insight into how global poverty is represented in the media. A number of studies have addressed this issue and raised concerns. A first concern relates to the choice of narratives and images, through which NGOs portray the poor as passive, helpless victims and emphasise the difference and distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (e.g., Choulilaraki, 2006; Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Dogra, 2012; Manzo, 2008). Dogra (2012), for example, explained how NGOs contribute to the ‘othering’ of the poor by using images of passive women and innocent children in backward rural settings, as opposed to the active and developed donors in the Western world. Likewise, Kennedy (2009) described how humanitarian organisations sell suffering and perpetuate a narrative in which Western aid organisations are empowered to act for helpless Southerners.

A second concern being voiced is the de-contextualisation of global poverty. Both NGOs and media workers tend to portray poverty as something that is caused by internal problems, such as overpopulation, drought, or corruption leaders. The (historical) role of the West in the creation or perpetuation of poverty and injustice is largely ignored (Dogra, 2012; Lugo-Ocando, 2015). Consequently, humanitarian organisations present ‘giving aid’ as an easy solution to the poverty problem (Dogra, 2012). Western news media, in turn, perpetuate the narrative of development and growth as a solution to poverty, whilst ignoring the story of global injustice and the need for structural changes (Lugo-Ocando, 2015).

These investigations deserve more in-depth study. Although they provide valuable insight into the dilemmas concerning certain representations, none of them give a comprehensive overview of the diversity in the portrayals of global poverty. Specific poverty framing studies could fill this gap. Previous studies have been few in number and limited in scope; most have been confined to local poverty or to the use of images (e.g., Bullock, Fraser, Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Campbell, 2007; Manzo, 2008). Furthermore, the applied methodology in these framing studies obscures the potential diversity of existing poverty frames, because they used a predetermined list of frames (e.g., Clawson & Trice, 2000; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). However, such generic, pre-defined frames give little insight into the representation of the topic at hand (Van Gorp, 2007). Moreover, when using predefined frames, researchers run the risk of overlooking relevant frames that are not on the list.

We overcome this disadvantage by an inductive framing analysis, which has the objective of examining a topic with an open mind and uncovering all possible frames around a subject (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). As a result, this qualitative in-depth analysis gains in completeness, specificity, and power of expression. Hence, the scientific contribution of this study is the formulation of a set of ‘global poverty frames’ and the exposition of how they are applied in the mass media. Our focus is on news articles and NGO-advertisements, areas where the general audience easily comes in contact with the subject (Dogra, 2012; European Commission, 2011).

In addition, the study aims to explore how frames defend various positions about development cooperation. We thereby focus on two issues. The first concerns the motive behind aid: why should the West get involved in development cooperation? We follow Van Heerde and Hudson (2009), who argued that concern for poverty can either stem from moral drivers or self-interested drivers. Moral drivers correspond with serving the interests of others: development aid should primarily benefit the poor. Self-interested drivers, by contrast, suggest that development aid should primarily serve the economic or political interest of the donors in the West.

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The second topic concerns the outcome of development cooperation: is aid effective? Gulrajani (2011) described two opposing perspectives in this ‘effectiveness-debate’. The first is the radical perspective, occupied by downright opponents of development aid on the right and left sides of the political spectrum. ‘Radicals on the right’ believe that aid frustrates the free market and promotes corruption and dependency. ‘Radicals on the left’ believe that aid is a neo-colonial tool which undermines the autonomy and self-determination of developing countries. ‘Reformers’ occupy the second perspective. They believe that foreign aid can improve peoples’ lives, if only the right approach is chosen. Our research approaches the ‘battles’ surrounding the motives for giving aid and the effectiveness of aid from a framing perspective and examines how frames propagate the different positions.

2.3 Framing and the construction of reality

This paper builds on the social constructionism assumption that knowledge about the world is developed in interaction with other people: there is not just an objective reality, but also a belief about the social and political reality that we create together (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Scheufele, 1999). Frames are not purely individual, but belong to an organised set of values, stories, world-views, and beliefs, all of which are shared in the collective memory of a large group of people (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Van Gorp, 2007). Language and imagery play an important role in the construction of this interactive reality: the character of any ‘reality’ depends on the choice of what is being displayed, emphasised, or repressed (Edelman, 1993). Hence, the manner in which an issue is framed contributes to the construction of a socially shared reality.

To operationalise these frames, we used a definition by Entman, who identified the functions of framing in a communication process: framing deals with defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgements, and suggesting remedies (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Subsequently, a frame about global poverty should tell us about the essence of the issue, its causes and consequences, the moral values involved, and the potential solutions.

Entman (1993, p. 52) and Gamson & Modigliani (1989, p. 2) maintain that frames manifest themselves in a communicating text through features such as keywords, visual and stereotyped images, catchphrases, moral appeals, and symbolic devices. These elements are clustered; we encounter them not as individual items, but as ‘interpretative packages’ (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2). Moreover, Entman (1993, p. 53) emphasised the importance of selection and salience in a communication process; some bits of information are highlighted and made more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences. In conclusion, reconstructing frames entails detecting salient devices in a text, such as keywords and catchphrases, and clustering them into coherent stories. For example, a picture of an exhausted refugee in Somalia, accompanied by words like ‘drought’, ‘suffering’ and ‘hunger’, can be interpreted as the narrative or the frame of the innocent victim who fell prey to tragic circumstances.

On the basis of this theoretical framework, the study aims to identify a wide variety of poverty frames, including frames that are not used regularly in contemporary communications. The purpose here is to capture the diversity of frames, not to determine their frequency or to compare countries. The study first asks which frames are used to represent global poverty and how they are employed in news articles and NGO-advertisements in the UK, the Netherlands, and Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. Subsequently, the study asks how these frames are forwarded to defend various positions on the motives for offering development assistance and the effectiveness of aid.

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Inductive framing analysis

An inductive framing analysis was performed to construct a comprehensive set of global poverty frames. The main objective of an inductive framing analysis is the description of a range of distinctive frame packages. A frame package is a coherent entity of framing devices and reasoning devices, which are labelled by an overarching core frame (Van Gorp, 2007, 2010).

Framing devices are manifest textual and visual elements, such as choice of words, pictures, graphs, and arguments. A visual framing device, for example, could be the image of a starving child and verbal or textual devices could be words such as ‘fragile’, ‘vulnerable’, and ‘desperate’. Reasoning devices are underlying ideas, which form a route of causal reasoning in a message, such as: What is the problem? What are the causes and consequences? Which core values are involved? What should be done? A certain text could, for example, point to bad leadership as a cause of poverty in developing countries.
The most important difference between framing and reasoning devices is that reasoning devices do not have to be explicitly included in a message. When interpreting a message, the reader or viewer makes a connection between the text, the frame, and his or her own mental schemata, and makes inferences about the ‘missing’ reasoning devices. For example, images of disaster victims appeal to the reader’s moral values (that they deserve help), even without explicitly mentioning this.

Finally, the core frame represents the central idea of the frame package. It links coherent framing and reasoning devices to an overarching cultural theme – for example, a metaphor, archetype, value, myth, or stereotype. Examples of potential labels are ‘the innocent victim’ (archetype), ‘the corrupt dictator’ (stereotype), or ‘social justice’ (value).

Conducting an inductive framing analysis poses a challenge: the researcher’s own mental constructs may interfere with the identification of frames. This problem was addressed by applying the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), in which newly collected framing and reasoning devices were continuously compared with previously identified frames. That offered the opportunity to repeatedly support, refine and complement preliminary findings. Moreover, the preliminary frame matrix was extensively discussed during three member checks with development experts. In that way, the chance of individual researcher bias was reduced.

2.4.2 Data collection and analysis

The analysis was carried out in three phases that were partly conducted in parallel. The purpose of the first phase was to create a provisional matrix of global poverty frames. The purpose of the second phase was to test, refine and validate this matrix. The third phase was used to get an understanding of the employment of the frames in the debate on development cooperation.

Creating a provisional matrix

During the first phase, which took place between February and May 2013, we collected an initial selection of 31 communications. The aim was to gather a selection of documents that would contain a wide variation of viewpoints about global poverty and development aid, in order to detect as many different framing and reasoning devices as possible. The search started with books from contemporary writers (e.g., Sachs, Moyo, Collier). It was supplemented with communications from political parties (e.g., NV-A (BE), GroenLinks (NL), blogs (e.g., www.geenstijl.nl, www.sunco.uk) and the World Bank. Also included were historical texts that reflect on the poverty issue, such as Bible verses (e.g., Matthew 19:21) and the Communist Manifesto.

Potential framing and reasoning devices in these texts were identified and copied to a datasheet. This resulted in a datasheet with 842 text samples and corresponding codes referring to the categories of framing devices, such as metaphors and catchphrases, and reasoning devices, each of which pointed either to the core of the problem, the causes and consequences, the solution, the role of development aid, or the moral implications. Thereafter, the codes were listed by looking for patterns and linking the abstract, overarching dimensions. For example, a specific code referred to ‘human behaviour’ as a cause of poverty (e.g., bad leaders, corrupt officials), and another to ‘institutional failures’ (e.g., weak healthcare and education systems). Subsequently, the codes were manually clustered according to their logical connectedness, in order to reduce the long list of codes to a workable list of meaningful meta-codes.

Next, these meta-codes were used to fill the cells of a frame matrix (see Table 2.1). Each column of the matrix represented a type of framing or reasoning device and each row a coherent package. For example, one row combined ‘human suffering’ as the central problem with ‘helping the needy’ as a moral message and ‘providing relief aid’ as a solution. Finally, these frame packages were named with an overarching label that represented the core idea of the frame, such as ‘the victim,’ ‘progress,’ and ‘the global village.’ Collecting material, coding, and filling the matrix ended when newly found material merely reflected items that were already in the matrix instead of expanding it.
Testing and validating the matrix

The analysis then entered a second evaluation and validation phase. The initial results were validated through three member checks in June 2013 with people who were familiar with the global poverty issue and who could quickly grasp the idea of poverty framing. The first group included seven staff members of Wilde Ganzen, a Dutch NGO; the second consisted of five professional media workers. The last group was composed of six PhD candidates from Africa and Asia at the Centre for International Development Issues at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. During these feedback sessions we tested whether people recognised and understood the frames, and whether they felt that certain frames were missing. The feedback was used to further elucidate the frame descriptions.

Next, we examined whether a newly reviewed and larger number of communications fit in the preliminary list of frame packages, as a way to verify them and to identify frames that had potentially been overlooked. We derived those communications from two datasets that were selected between October 2013 and March 2014. The first consisted of 1,096 newspaper articles about global poverty and development cooperation that were published in daily newspapers in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Flanders between 2011 and 2013. Articles were selected using different search terms that came from the frame descriptions, such as ‘poverty’, ‘drought’, ‘dictator’, ‘hunger’, and ‘development aid’. In addition to news and background articles, the selection contained editorials, letters from readers, and opinion articles. We choose a period of three years to ensure that the content was not heavily influenced by one-off events that attract a lot of media attention, such as a famine or disaster. The second dataset was composed of 284 NGO-advertisements from 82 organisations that were published or broadcast in the same countries between January 2011 and March 2014. Our focus was on messages in the mass media, such as TV-ads and advertisements in magazines. The material was found inductively by asking NGOs, extracting it from newspapers and magazines, and searching organisations’ websites and YouTube channels.

Both datasets were constructed with the aim to carry out a deductive frame analysis at a later stage. For the current study, we did not systematically analyse the data, but rather looked for examples to sharpen the frame matrix and ‘thicken’ the frame descriptions. Moreover, we specifically looked for anomalies, such as striking headlines and statements that could not be linked to any of the frames, and hence could point to frames that we had overlooked. During this evaluation phase some ‘thin’ frames were completed, some new frames were identified, and some incomplete frames were regrouped at a higher level of abstraction. For example, the initial matrix contained separate frames that identified ‘inequality’ and ‘injustice’ as causes of poverty. However, the framing devices strongly overlapped: both frames could be identified through words such as ‘justice’, ‘fairness’, and ‘rights’, whereupon they were combined into one ‘social justice’ frame.

Analysing the framing of global poverty and development cooperation

The third and final phase was used to obtain insight into the role of the frames in communications about global poverty and discussions regarding development cooperation. This phase took place between January and March 2014. Just as during the previous phase, we did not systematically examine the data, but rather specifically looked for examples of who used certain frames and why.

2.5 Results

2.5.1 Nine global poverty frames

The analysis yielded nine distinctive global poverty frames, which are presented in Table 2.1. This table provides an answer to the first research question. It shows the frame packages, each composed of a central theme (the frame), a problem definition and other reasoning devices, and examples of manifest verbal and visual devices. The table is followed by an illustrative description of the frames, and examples of how they were used in news articles and NGO-advertisements.

Frame 1: The Victim

The central theme of the victim frame is the misery and destitution of people living in poverty. The poor suffer from a lack of food, medical care and

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3 | The search was done with LexisNexis (for Dutch and British newspapers) and Mediargus (for Flemish newspapers). The following newspapers were included: United Kingdom: Daily Mirror; The Daily Telegraph; The Guardian; The Sun; The Times (n=397); the Netherlands: Brabants Dagblad; Dagblad van het Noorden; De Gelderlander; Noordhollands Dagblad; NRC Handelsblad; De Telegraaf; de Volkskrant (n=509); Belgium (Flanders): Gazet van Antwerpen; Het Laatste Nieuws; De Morgen; De Standaard (n=230).
proper housing. The victim frame portrays them as innocent and helpless; they have fallen prey to unfortunate circumstances beyond their control. They are incapable of helping themselves and need outside support.

The clichéd visual image of the victim frame is the starving child with flies on its face. Other visual devices portray ‘the rich’ in their role as ‘helper’ – for example, a ‘white’ doctor curing ‘poor’ patients. Verbal devices may use the metaphor of disaster or struggle for survival, and include vivid descriptions of human misery. The victim frame is old and widespread: it was seen in the writings of the monotheistic religions (the Bible, the Quran) and present day newspaper articles and books about global poverty.

The frame was highly visible in news stories and appeals after natural disasters and emergencies, such as the drought in the Horn of Africa in 2012 and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013. NGOs deployed the frame to raise awareness of the tragedy, evoke compassion, and motivate the audience to donate money. However, the use of the victim frame was not limited to emergencies, but also extended to news articles and campaigns that drew attention to the continuing effects of chronic poverty. An example is a television advertisement by the charity Sightsavers International, which confronts the viewer with the torment of a Malawian woman who suffers from trachoma, a severe eye disease (Sightsavers International, 2012).

Frame 2: Progress

The progress frame departs from the belief that progress and development are obviously good for everyone. In the context of global poverty, the frame asserts that poverty is the result of slow development; countries are poor because their economies, infrastructure, healthcare, and education systems have not yet fully matured. Metaphors used in the progress frame often have elements of movement: a journey, climbing out of poverty, going through stages of growth. Visual devices show signs of improvement and modern technology – for example, the construction of roads and hospitals.

NGOs used the frame in their communications about education, water and sanitation, and food security projects, either to highlight the progress that had been achieved (thanks to their work) or, more often, the progress that could be achieved (with more help from donors). For example, an advertisement from Vredeseilanden (2011), a Flemish NGO, shows a Congolese farmer who had boosted the local chicken industry by investing in an incubator. The NGO then asked for more donor support in order to sponsor more farmers like him. Newspapers often used the frame in economic news about developing countries, as is shown in this headline of NRC Handelsblad, a Dutch daily: ‘India’s economy falters after years of rapid growth’ (Boom, 2013).

Frame 3: Social Justice

The third frame in this overview is built around the value of social justice and equality. It asserts that poverty in a world of plenty is a sign that societies are arranged in an unfair and unequal way; the poor are denied the freedoms, opportunities, and resources to sustain themselves. The frame can be used to emphasise the importance of a fair distribution of wealth, as well as the promotion of equal rights, freedoms, and opportunities. The frame can be identified by words, such as ‘right’, ‘injustice’, ‘unfairness’, ‘discrimination’, and ‘fight’.

In newspapers, the frame was used in articles about marginalised groups, such as exploited workers, women, or children. An example is an article in De Morgen about the murder of baby girls from poor families in Pakistan (Erkul, 2011). The frame was important in the discourse of many NGOs, such as Oxfam, HIVOS, and Plan, who specifically used it in campaigns for the rights of workers, women and girls, vulnerable children, and people with disabilities. For instance, Plan, a Dutch NGO, ran a campaign with the slogan ‘Plan fights for the freedom of girls’ (Plan, 2013).

Frame 4: Bad Governance

The bad governance frame links poverty to failing governance in developing countries. The assumption of the frame is that countries are poor because their leaders and elites are incompetent, corrupt, and irresponsible. Leaders are driven by a search for power and personal wealth, do not serve the interests of the poor, and spark local conflicts and rivalries.

A central figure in this frame is the stereotypical ‘corrupt dictator’. Visuals include images of warring militias and leaders exhibiting their power with military uniforms and clenched fists. Words and metaphors often have to do with the waste of donor money; bad leaders or corrupt governments receive ‘bags of aid’ and ‘fill their pockets’.

Bad governance was a popular frame for critics of development aid and it was prominent in opinion pieces on this topic in newspapers. Moreover, the frame was seen in newspaper articles about local conflicts and fraudulent elections. For instance, De Telegraaf, a Dutch daily, wrote that after the elections in Afghanistan, deputies who lost their seat ran off with their weapons,
computers, and cars (Kuitert, 2011). Occasionally the frame was seen in NGO-advertisements that were related to wars and conflicts, such as a Syria Crisis Appeal of the Red Cross (2012).

Frame 5: Global Village

‘Global Village’ is a saying that emphasises the growing interconnectedness of a globalising world. The central theme in the global village frame is that we all have a joint responsibility for the sustainable future of the planet. Cross-border issues, such as climate change and international crime, which mainly affect the poorest, increasingly determine this future. At the same time, persistent poverty exacerbates these cross-border problems and undermines a sustainable future for all. Verbal devices of the global village frame are words and expressions such as ‘mutual self-interest’, ‘connection’, and ‘global public goods’. Examples of visuals are images and captions that visualise the consequences of climate change, such as droughts and floods, for the poor in developing countries.

Global village was an important frame in news articles (during the time of data collection) on the UN Climate Summit and the Post-2015 development agenda. For example, The Guardian published a comment which stated that ‘(…) the global north (…) has made far less substantial pledges than the south, which is least responsible for climate change but whose people are the most at risk’ (Bidwai, 2011).

In addition, opinion leaders, leftist political parties and NGOs used the frame to communicate about mutual responsibilities and the future of development aid. For instance, the climate campaign of the Belgian NGO 11.11.11 employed the frame to point out ‘our’ responsibility to minimise the negative effects of climate change by investing in renewable energy (11.11.11, 2011).

Frame 6: Blame Us

As in the global village frame, the interconnectedness between rich and poor countries is prominent in the blame us frame. However, whereas the global village frame emphasises that rich and poor countries alike have a mutual responsibility to ensure a sustainable future, the blame us frame points at the guilty role played by the West. The frame is based on the notion that the rich world harms the poor world. Rich countries or elites have expanded their wealth at the expense of the poor. In the past, rich countries damaged poor countries though colonisation and the exploitation of natural resources. Nowadays, they hurt the poor through an unfair global economic systems, grabbing land, and the ‘bad behaviour’ of big companies. Visual devices emphasise the rich world’s misbehaviour, such as oil spills of multinationals that ruin the environment in Africa.

In news articles, the frame was found in stories about the role of Western multinationals in the working conditions in Congolese mines or Asian clothing factories. For example, the Daily Mirror published a section with readers’ responses to the collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh. Readers blamed both the garment industry and Western consumers for the tragedy, with comments such as ‘chains that rely on cheap labour must take responsibility’ and ‘it is our desire for cheap fashion that lies at the root of this tragedy’ (Parker, 2013). In communications about international development, the blame us frame was seen in NGO-campaigns such as ‘Behind the Brands’ (see www.behindthebrands.org), which criticised land grabs by Western multinationals.

Frame 7: Every Man for Himself

The proverb ‘every man for himself’ points out that every person is responsible for his or her own wealth and destiny. Everyone should do what is best for him or her and pursuing self-interest is not necessarily a bad thing; if everyone does this, the wealth and happiness of all will increase. In the context of poverty, the frame is used to highlight that it is the responsibility of poor people and poor countries themselves to change their situation. Following this logic, rich countries should not interfere, unless it serves their own economic and political interests.

In the material studied, the frame served to propagate very different views. On the one hand, it emphasised the negative qualities of the poor and argued that they were largely to blame for their own destitution, with comments such as ‘parents should stop popping [children] out like a production line’ (The Sun, 2013). On the other hand, ‘every man for himself’ was used to highlight the positive traits of the poor and praise their creativity and entrepreneurship. That way, the frame served to point at the remedies for ending poverty. For instance, Oikocredit, a Dutch microfinance company, portrayed an African tailor and suggested that returns on investing in her business were as high as in a bank (Oikocredit, 2012).

Frame 8: Impending Doom

The impending doom frame portrays the rich as potential victims. The frame asserts that the effects of global poverty can be felt in rich societies,
impending doom

8. Blame Us

People indulge in immoral behaviour and must do penance for their sins.

The rich world harms the poor world.

The root of global poverty lies in the behaviour of the rich world (colonisation, economic exploitation, etc.), which puts poor countries at a disadvantage.

Disasters and inability to meet basic needs; breed poverty and suffering; causes are beyond people's control. Poor countries lag behind; their economies, education system, healthcare system, etc., have not yet fully developed.

The stability of our society is under constant threat from external forces.

Poverty is a threat to security, stability and wealth in rich countries.

The effects of global poverty can spread beyond borders and affect the security and stability in our society; 'we' must be protected against these threats.

Bad governance

4. Social Justice

A socially just society recognises the dignity, equality and human rights of every person.

Poverty is the outcome of injustice and inequality.

The poor lack the opportunities, freedoms and rights to sustain themselves and participate in society.

Progress

9. The Victim

Life is full of tragedy; innocent people are overcome by superior forces.

Poverty is a tragedy that affects innocent people and causes human suffering.

Disasters and inability to meet basic needs; breed poverty and suffering; causes are beyond people's control.

The rich should relieve the suffering.

Charity and aid prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, medical care.

It is our moral responsibility to help people in need.

Tragedy, disaster, hunger; visuals of hungry and sick people; 'rich' people aiding the poor.

Progress

2. Bad Governance

Bad leaders are obsessed with personal wealth and power and do not serve the interest of their people.

Poverty is a sign of bad governance in poor countries.

Poor countries are governed by incompetent and corrupt elites. This results in weak institutions, conflicts, and a failure of government to provide for basic needs.

Build roads, schools, hospitals; invest in economic growth and employment; technological innovation.

Development aid should lead to visible and measurable improvements.

Modernisation and progress lead to a better life for all.

Climbing out of poverty; growth figures; visuals of new roads, schools, solar panels.

Social Justice

5. Every Man for Himself

Every person is responsible for his own wealth and happiness in life.

Poverty is a matter of individual responsibility.

If everyone pursues self-interest, it benefits the public good.

Individual work ethic and responsible behaviour.

Aid creates dependency; trade should be the basis of our dealings with poor countries.

We have a joint responsibility for the future of our planet. Unity with nature; protecting the environment.

Food crisis; climate crisis; global public good; enlightened self-interest.

Chain of Being

Everything on earth has a predestined place in the chain of being.

Poverty is not a problem, it is a natural condition.

Poverty is part of the world order; if people do not crave wealth, they do not suffer from poverty.

The functioning of the cosmos is 'just'; getting what you deserve is already built into the moral fabric of the cosmos.

There is no need for development aid.

Contentment, moral purity, redemption, detachment from material want. ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God’ (Luke 6:20).
through, for example, uncontrolled migration, international terrorism, and deadly epidemics. Words and metaphors in the impending doom frame have elements of losing control (conflicts getting out of hand, floods of migrants, panic, etc.). Visual devices include terrorist training camps and refugees attempting to enter Europe.

The frame was not observed in the NGO-campaigns and rarely seen in news articles. An example was an article in De Morgen, in which NATO warned that climate change in the developing world could double the number of armed conflicts and directly threaten global security (‘Opwarming zorgt voor oorlogsclimaat’ [Global warming creates war climate], 2011, p. 35).

Frame 9: Chain of Being

The final frame in this overview was the least visible frame during the analysis. The ‘great chain of being’ – a concept derived from Plato and Aristotle – describes a strict hierarchical structure of all matter of life. Everything on earth has a place in the chain of being; it is a natural order, which should not be contested. The chain of being serves as a label for a static view of global poverty: the world is just the way it is and the poor should accept what befalls them in life. Poverty does not have to make them miserable, as long as they accept their fate.

Like the victim frame, the chain of being is an ancient frame; during the analysis of the initial selection it was used in writings from or about Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and monotheistic religions. More recently, the frame was reflected in writings about pre-industrial society, in which all of humanity lived in abject poverty and this was the normal state of affairs. However, the frame was not observed in our selection of NGO-ads and news articles.

2.5.2 Defending positions on international development cooperation

The above descriptions answered the first research question by presenting an overview of global poverty frames and showing how propagated ‘solutions’ to global poverty are related to the assumed problem definitions, causes, and moral convictions. To answer the second research question, this section shifts the focus to discussions about development cooperation. During the analysis we reconstructed each frame’s position on development aid and recorded this in a column in the frame matrix (Table 2.1, ‘role of development aid’). Furthermore, we identified two topics that are important in the debate about development cooperation. The first concerns the motive for offering development aid (Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009), the second concerns its effectiveness (Gulrajani, 2011). Our examination of news articles and NGO-ads generated multiple examples of how stakeholders employed various frames to advance opposing positions in these ‘battles of ideas’.

Battle 1: Why should the West get involved?

In the first ‘battle’, frames were used to convince the public of the importance of international development cooperation. One position is that we have a responsibility to enhance the wellbeing of others. This argument was most noticeable in the communications of NGOs, and especially the victim and social justice frames were used to propagate this view. Their campaigns focused almost without exception on the suffering and injustice that affected ‘the other’. Example is a Concern Worldwide poster from 2013, which shows a malnourished girl and asks the audience to donate and buy her a supply of emergency food.

By contrast, other communicators, notably politicians, emphasised that we should get involved in international cooperation because it is to our advantage. They used the every man for himself and impending doom frames to emphasise its importance for our economy and our security. This became already evident from the initial analysis of party programs and was subsequently confirmed by articles in which they defended their position. For instance, de Standaard quoted foreign secretary Didier Reijnders arguing that ‘It is in our own interest to be generous’ (Hancké, 2012).

These moral or self-interested drivers have logical implications for the suggested policies; if the West is primarily concerned about the welfare of others, then international cooperation should focus on areas such as disaster relief, food security, healthcare, education, and income generation. If it is primarily concerned about its own welfare, then policies should, for example, be designed to benefit Western businesses, curb international conflicts, and prevent immigration from poor countries.

The aforementioned frames supported either one or the other position, and were not easily combined in one message. However, some communicators attempted to break the deadlock between ‘their’ or ‘our’ interests by using the global village frame. This was particularly the case with the advocates of the Post-2015 agenda, which later resulted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, Paul Polman, a member of the UN-expert panel on the formulation of the goals, explained in de Volkskrant that the essence of
the SDGs is that ‘everyone gets convinced to put the common interest above self-interest’ (Vos, 2013). By emphasising the interest of all, the frame was employed to build a wide consensus on a new global agenda for action.

**Battle 2: Is development assistance effective?**

In this second battle, frames served to convince the public of the effectiveness of development cooperation. Gulrajani (2011) identified a ‘radical’ perspective, taken by rejecters of aid, and a ‘reformist perspective’, adopted by people who endorse the premise of aid, but question whether the right approach is being used. In the data, both perspectives were visible and they were primarily driven by two frames: progress and bad governance. Proponents and critics of foreign aid used the progress frame to argue that aid had ‘greatly improved’ or ‘not at all improved’ the lives of the poor. This battle was clearly noticeable in the media when the budget for development aid was on the political agenda. For example, *de Volkskrant* quoted Gates when he argued that the Dutch government should ‘not touch development aid’ since it has helped ‘to bring down child mortality from 12 to 8 million a year’ (De Waard, 2012). In addition, NGOs employed the progress frame more or less continuously in their advertisements to communicate what they had achieved, or rather, what they intended to achieve with the help of donations.

Conversely, critics of development aid employed the progress frame in debates about the budget to highlight its disappointing results. For example, *The Guardian* questioned the British government’s decision to ring-fence the aid budget by noting that despite receiving massive amounts of aid, most African countries ‘don’t compare to South Korea in terms of progress’ (Edemariam, 2012). Being employed by critics as well as proponents, the frame contributed to a balanced and diverse discussion on the effectiveness of aid and desired anti-poverty policies.

Such versatility was much less apparent in the use of the bad governance frame. In the material studied, the frame was used almost exclusively by radicals who highlighted the adverse effects of aiding bad leaders and the waste of donor money through corruption. An example is an article in the *Mirror*, which quoted a resigning charity CEO who claimed that ‘the entire international aid programme has been a failure – due to corrupt governments’ (Taylor, 2011).

The bad governance frame, we noticed, was rarely countered in NGO-campaigns and news articles on development cooperation. Consequently, in this debate the frame predominantly served to argue that development aid should be stopped. In fact, the bad governance frame could also transmit another narrative, suggesting, for example, that people in developing countries are equally fed up with bad leaders and corruption, and that development aid could help them to hold their governments accountable. This could contribute to a more nuanced debate about the results of development aid and the desired policies. During the analysis, such counter-narratives were voiced in personal communications with NGO staff, and in some books and policy reports, but they were rarely seen in NGO communications or news articles.

**2.6 Discussion and conclusion**

By means of an inductive framing analysis we have reconstructed nine global poverty frames, each relating global poverty to a specific problem definition, causes, solutions, moral convictions, and position on development aid. We have illustrated them with examples of how news media and NGOs in the UK, the Netherlands, and Flanders use them to persuade their audience. More specifically, our analysis provided insight into how frames are employed in recurrent discussions about the motives for providing aid and the effectiveness of international development cooperation.

With respect to the discussion of development assistance, two points are worth noting. First, two frames, chain of being and blame us, were not mentioned in our discussion. The chain of being frame could suggest that development aid is not needed because poverty is not a problem that needs to be solved. Blame us could be used to argue that development aid is ineffective because structural changes in the West are needed to solve poverty. However, we did not find examples of these positions in our data. Second, during the assessment of our initial small selection we noticed that sharp criticisms of aid effectiveness were voiced in books, blogs, and party programmes (e.g., Moyo’s ‘Dead Aid’, www.sunco.uk, and the PVV). These criticisms were sometimes reflected in opinion pieces in newspapers, but not often in the regular articles. Obviously, they were not voiced in NGO-advertisements. This suggests that a forceful debate on aid-effectiveness is being conducted outside the mainstream news media.

Lastly, we want to reflect on some of the practical implications for strategic communicators in the field of global poverty, especially for NGOs. We argued that having insight into poverty framing is especially important for NGOs, who struggle to respond to the wavering public engagement with
global poverty (Bond, 2014; Darnton & Kirk, 2011).

The frame matrix can help NGOs in different ways. First, and on a meta-
level, it could increase awareness that building support for international de-
velopment does not happen in the real world: it happens in a reconstruction of
the real world that is formed by language and imagery. Second, the matrix
could help NGOs to reflect on their own frames and to consider alternatives.
For example, NGOs are being criticised for their use of the victim frame
(Dogra, 2012; Manzo, 2008). Our frame matrix shows that there are alterna-
tive frames, such as the social justice and progress frames, that would enable
them to communicate about poverty without depicting the poor as passive
and helpless. Third, NGOs could use the matrix to better understand the lines
of reasoning of others, especially the critics of their work. For example, it ap-
ppears that the bad governance frame, a popular frame of aid-critics, is barely
countered in the public discourse. The model could help NGOs to formulate a
‘good governance’ frame to counter this narrative.

The presented examples in this study should not be regarded as a compre-
prehensive description, but rather as a starting point for further analysis of com-
munications about global poverty and development cooperation. Moreover,
the frame matrix could serve as a basis for future research – for example, a
quantitative content analysis of media messages and NGO communications
or a framing effect study that investigates how the public perceives messages
with different frames. This would contribute to the practical application of
the framing approach and further validate and refine the presented global
poverty frames.
Abstract: This article contributes to the ongoing debate on the representation of global poverty in Western media. Both NGOs and journalists are being criticised for their one-sided emphasis on the misery and dependency of people in developing countries. The objective of this paper is to measure the extent of such problematising representation in newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements. A frame analysis was conducted of 876 articles and 284 advertisements from the Netherlands, Flanders and the United Kingdom. The results challenge some conventional assumptions. Overall, the ‘victim frame’ and ‘pitiful images’ do not dominate the discourse of NGOs and newspapers. However, British NGOs are an exception: they portray the poor as ‘pitiful victims’ twice as often as their counterparts in the Netherlands and Flanders. Furthermore, the findings confirm the conviction that the media predominantly highlight poor countries’ dependence on the West.

Keywords: framing; frame-analysis; poverty; NGOs; newspapers; media

3.1 Introduction

From time to time, discontent arises with the portrayal of people from the global South by Western media and NGOs. An example was the awards ceremony on 17 November 2015 by Rusty Radiator, a Norwegian non-profit, for ‘the fundraising video with the worst use of stereotypes’ of Africa. The winner was Band Aid 30, an incarnation of the charity supergroup that raised money for Ethiopia in 1984. In 2014, a new group of artists recorded a slightly altered version of ‘Do they know it’s Christmas’ to help fight Ebola in Western Africa. The clip begins with a shot of a half-naked, emaciated African woman, who is carried from her house by masked men in white overalls. The next shot shows the Band Aid artists entering the recording studio. The jury verdict was unmerciful: ‘Band Aid30 contributed to the spread of misinformation and stereotypes of Africa as a country filled with misery and diseases’ (Rusty Radiator, 2015).

Rusty Radiator is just one of many civil society groups that plea for another image of developing countries, especially in Africa. Similar organisations include Wilde Geese in the Netherlands and Denmark, IDLeaks in the Netherlands and Common Cause in the UK. The participants in this debate are a mix of students and media and development professionals, who are driven by a belief that the representation of the global South is overly negative and one-sided in stereotyping people from the South as miserable, passive and helpless.

This study connects with the unease about the representation of global poverty. Its objective is not to dispute the arguments of critics such as Rusty Radiator. Instead, our aim is to question the underlying premise that the media indeed make excessive use of negative and stereotypical images of the global South. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine how poverty in developing countries is represented in contemporary communications, and to assess to what extent ‘negative’ representations prevail.

3.2 Global poverty in the media

3.2.1 The debate on poverty representation

Discussion about the representation of global poverty has been ongoing since the 1970s, when images of hungry children started to appear in television news and fundraising materials of aid organisations. Already in 1981, the British magazine New Internationalist published a critical story that warned against the detrimental effects of using images of starving children (Lissner, 1981). It stated that the use of such images was both unethical and counter-productive in the long run. The debate peaked after the Ethiopian famine of
1984-85 with its emotional imagery of disaster victims (Dogra, 2012). Over time, NGOs became increasingly receptive to criticisms. In 1989, the General Assembly of European NGOs adopted a Code of Conduct, which encouraged NGOs to choose images and messages that respected human dignity and to avoid sensationalist or simplistic messages (Concord, 2012).

Nevertheless, critique on image use by NGOs and news media persists (see for an overview, Dogra, 2012; Tallon, 2008). The main topic is the use of images of suffering people, especially from Africa, which have been referred to as ‘the starving child image’ (Lissner, 1981, p. 23), ‘stereotypical starving babies’ (Manzo, 2008, p. 637) and ‘the dying malnourished child’ (Alam, 2007, p. 60). The debate is largely fuelled by two positions. On the one hand there are those who argue that this is simply the ‘reality’ in developing countries and that it is important to confront the public with such images to mobilise funds for humanitarian action (Cohen, 2001; Dogra, 2012). On the other side are the critics who point to the ethical implications and potential side effects. They argue that images of helpless victims are dehumanising and rob people of their dignity. Moreover, they reinforce the sense of superiority of Western civilisation by fortifying the narrative of the ‘powerful givers’ and the ‘grateful receivers’. Subsequently, such imagery underscores the difference between ‘us’ in the rich, advanced and wealthy West and ‘them’ in the poor, backward and stagnant South (Dogra, 2012; Kennedy, 2009; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Manzo, 2008).

Since the 1980s, there has also been discussion about what the alternative should be. Lissner (1981) noted that some advertisers had tried other options, for example by ‘showing Third World people as industrious and ingenious people who act intelligently within the limits of their resources’ (p. 24). This alternative has been labelled as ‘positive’ imagery, presenting people from the South as self-reliant, productive and active (Cohen, 2001; Dogra, 2012). Such ‘positive’ imagery served to counter the ‘negative’ imagery of passive, suffering and helpless people.

3.2.2 Problematising representations

So far we have used the common classification in the literature into ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ representations of people in developing countries. However, this terminology may be misleading, since it suggests that ‘negative’ representations are undesirable, while this should be open to debate. Therefore, we suggest to speak of ‘problematising’ representations instead.

For the purpose of this study, we distinguish three characteristics of problematising representations that are commonly mentioned in the literature. The first characteristic is a victim narrative; a storyline that highlights human suffering and destitution. The next chapter will describe this ‘victim frame’ in more detail. Second, we assert that problematising representations are reinforced by visuals that magnify human pain and suffering (Cohen, 2001; Kennedy, 2009). These are, for example, images of malnourished children in an emergency appeal of an NGO. Obviously, such images are often associated with victim narratives, but the connection is not one on one: stories with a victim frame do not always carry visuals (as in the case of written news articles or radio advertisements). And if they do, they may as well portray ‘neutral’ looking people. However, given the wide interest in ‘explicit victim imagery’ in the discussion, we consider it important to investigate this separate from the victim narrative.

Thirdly and finally, we connect ‘problematising’ with a lack of agency and helplessness. Hence, problematising representations are strengthened by texts or pictures that emphasise the dependence of (people from) developing countries on the help or intervention of the developed world. For example, a charity appeal may state that the life of a starving child can be saved with ‘your’ donation. Again, this is not necessarily confined to victim narratives: texts with a more ‘positive’ storyline may also suggest that outside help is needed to achieve improvement.

Despite the intensity of the discussion, surprisingly little is known about the scope of problematising representations in the media. Some studies argue that over time there has been a shift among NGOs towards more ‘positive’ or de-problematising representations (Clark, 2003; Dogra, 2007). Other studies suggest that, overall, media imagery of global poverty has remained much the same (DFID and BBC News, 2002; VSO, 2002). However, the extent to which various poverty portrayals are used in existing media messages is unknown. The lack of clarity is due to the fact that most studies are qualitative in nature, and many of them are limited to specific issues, countries or news events (e.g., Alam, 2007; Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Kennedy, 2009; Manzo; 2008). For example, Lugo-Ocando (2015) investigated how stereotypes of African countries are presented in the news and used Nigeria as a case study. Other examples are Campbell’s (2007) investigation of visuals from the famine in the Sahel and Clawson and Trice’s (2000) analysis of media portrayals of the American poor.

On the whole, this paper argues that the discussion about representation of global poverty could benefit from stronger empirical evidence. By and
large, existing studies reinforce the impression that the media especially dish out images of pathetic victims, in need of our support, and not much else. As a consequence, studies may fail to capture the diversity in communications of global poverty. What is more, the literature review shows that recent findings are mainly based on British data (e.g., Dogra, 2012; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009; Lugo-Ocando, 2015). Hence, they may also fail to capture differences between Britain and other countries.

3.3 Framing global poverty

We used a frame analysis to examine the representation of global poverty in the media. Framing, in a broad sense, refers to the manner in which a certain topic is represented in communications. In any text, a specific choice of topics, words, catchphrases, sounds and imagery can promote a certain interpretation of reality (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Frames themselves can be conceptualised as metanarratives. Each narrative, or frame, tells us something about the problem at stake, the causes and consequences, the moral judgement and the possible solutions (Entman, 1993). For example, a story about a struggling farmer in Somalia who was hit by a drought refers to the narrative or the frame of the innocent victim. People do not need to be exposed to the whole frame: when they see a picture of this particular farmer, they tend to understand the moral message that she is suffering and needs help.

Frames are not purely individual, but part of an organised set of values, stories, world-views and beliefs that are shared in the collective memory of a large group of people (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2007). It means that many frames are familiar to both the sender and recipient of a message. Thus, stakeholders in the field of poverty communication, such as NGOs and journalists, tap from this cultural reservoir of frames to promote their version of the reality about global poverty. Likewise, recipients use the same stock of frames to interpret the message.

For the current analysis we used a preliminary defined set of global poverty frames (Vossen, 2015). These frames were inductively derived from a wide range of communications about global poverty, such as books, news articles, NGO-campaigns and political party programmes. The texts were examined for the presence of framing elements, such as specific words and underlying lines of reasoning. These elements were grouped and used for the reconstruction of logically coherent poverty frames. Each frame conveyed a distinctive explanation of the essence of poverty, its causes and consequences, the moral values involved, and the potential solutions (for an overview of the applied method, see Van Gorp, 2007, 2010). In total, nine distinctive poverty frames were identified. They were labelled ‘the victim’; ‘progress’, ‘social justice’; ‘bad governance’; ‘the global village’; ‘blame us’; ‘impending doom’; ‘every man for himself’; and ‘chain of being’. The frequency of six frames was measured in a quantitative analysis. This paper reports on the four frames that were most prevalent.

The first is the victim frame. At the heart of this frame is the suffering and destitution of people in poverty. They have fallen prey to tragic circumstances through no fault of their own. The frame emphasises how lack of food, shelter, medical care and other basic needs contribute to miserable living conditions. The victim frame stirs empathy and pity and taps into the moral obligation of the rich to help the poor. It is this frame, with its emphasis on suffering and helplessness, which is at the heart of many critiques on representations of poverty in the media.

The second frame was labelled the progress frame. This frame asserts that poverty is an issue of lagging development. Poor countries are at an earlier and less-matured stage of development and need to catch up. Hence, the solution lies in economic development and improvements in areas such as health care, education and agriculture. The progress frame radiates optimism: development is good for everyone; our children will have a better future. However, it is important to note that the frame can also communicate about a lack of progress and stagnation. It is thus employed both in a positive and negative context.

The third frame is social justice, which defines poverty as injustice and inequality. Poverty in a world of abundance is a sign that societies are organised in an unfair way: people lack opportunities and freedoms to shape their lives and to provide for their own livelihoods. The moral principle under this frame is the inherent dignity and rights of every human being. Hence, it asserts that commitment to people in developing countries should be based on connectedness and mutual solidarity. Like the progress frame, this frame can highlight promising as well as problematic developments: it can depict how people successfully fight for their rights, but also how they are excluded or oppressed.
Finally, the *bad governance* frame associates poverty with failing governance in a developing country. A key figure in the bad governance story is the corrupt leader, who cares only about his own power and wealth and not about the welfare of the people. He represents incompetence, corruption, patronage and irresponsible leadership. The ‘bad leader’ can also take the shape of elites, rebel leaders and warring militias. The poor governance frame lays the responsibility in the developing countries themselves; their leaders and elites should behave responsibly and change their culture of patronage. The frame may inter alia be used to highlight the adverse effects of development aid, with words such as ‘greedy dictators’ that ‘siphon off aid money’ and ‘elites enriching themselves’.

### 3.4 Research questions

From the above we derive our main research question:

**RQ1** How do newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements frame global poverty and which frames are used most frequently?

More specifically, our objective is to connect with the critique on problematising representations in the media. Hence, we aim to determine the extent to which such representations are seen in current media content.

**RQ2** What is the frequency of the victim frame in NGO-advertisements and newspaper stories on global poverty?

**RQ3** What is the frequency of ‘pitiful images’ of people from developing countries in NGO-advertisements and news photos?

**RQ4** To what extent do newspapers and NGO-advertisements portray (people from) developing countries as ‘dependent on the developed world’?

For the purpose of our study, two additional points need to be taken into account. They both have to do with the question of who exactly contributes to certain poverty portrayals. The first point concerns the source of information about global poverty. People identify the news media and NGOs as their main sources of knowledge about developing countries (European Commission, 2011; DFID and BBC News, 2002; Dogra, 2012). The current study is interested how each of these information carriers contributes to the framing of global poverty. However, those information carriers have very different roles. The media aim for balanced coverage of newsworthy events related to global poverty, ideally reflecting many aspects of the reality in developing countries. The objective of NGOs is much more specific. Their communications are aimed at raising funds for their projects or creating awareness about social issues. Many assert that dramatic stories and visuals are most suitable to persuade people to donate money or to take action (Cohen, 2001; Dogra, 2012; Manzo, 2008). Hence, our expectation is that NGOs publish more problematising stories and images than newspapers.

**H1** NGOs are more likely than news media to display problematising representations of global poverty

The second point concerns the country where the message is coming from. Existing studies into poverty representations are mainly based on British data (e.g., Dogra, 2012; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). Hence, they may fail to capture differences between Britain and other countries. The current study therefore compares data from different countries to measure whether the findings are country-specific. To this end, we compared Britain with the Netherlands and Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. This choice was partly made for practical reasons: since the investigation into frames is highly language-sensitive, the country-selection was limited by the languages that were spoken by the researchers. However, the choice was also motivated by presumed cultural differences between these countries. For example, the media culture in the Anglo-Saxon UK differs from that in the continental Netherlands and Flanders (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); British newspapers are more often associated with sensational news and dramatic stories to arouse their audience than those in continental Europe. We ask:

**RQ5** What are the differences between the representation of global poverty in the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders?
3.5 Method

3.5.1 Data collection

We selected articles that paid attention to poverty in developing countries from seven Dutch (n=357), four Flemish (n=230) and five British (n=289) newspapers. The articles were published from January 2011 to December 2013. The selected papers are a mix of large national, regional, ‘popular’ and ‘quality’ papers, which reflect the media landscapes in each of the countries. The search was done with LexisNexis (for Dutch and British newspapers) and Mediargus (for Flemish newspapers). Search terms were obtained from the frame descriptions, such as ‘poverty’, ‘development’, ‘hunger’, ‘trade’, ‘aid’ and ‘dictator’. The search not only generated stories that problematised poverty, but also stories that focused on the reduction of poverty and the improvement of living conditions and rights of people living in poverty. After a manual removal of irrelevant articles (for example, about sport or the illness and death of Nelson Mandela), 1,580 Dutch, 1,063 Flemish and 1,984 British articles remained. From these, a random sample was drawn of respectively 289, 230 and 357 articles (total n=876). 421 of these articles were published with a photograph; 403 photos were retrieved (119 Dutch, 112 Flemish and 172 British) via the websites of newspapers, image libraries and the Dutch National Library.

In addition, we collected 284 advertisements from 44 Dutch (n=169), 14 Flemish (n=42) and 24 British (n=73) NGOs that were published or broadcast between January 2011 and March 2014. Our focus was on messages in the mass media, such as TV-ads and advertisements in magazines, which the general audience comes across without making a deliberate effort to do so. The NGO-umbrella-organisations in each country (UK: Bond; the Netherlands: Partos; Flanders: 11.11.11) provided a list of the largest NGOs, which served as a starting point for the collection of material. Some of the material was sent or given by NGOs. The rest was found through the internet, for example through organisations’ websites and YouTube channels. In addition, clippings from newspapers and magazines were collected. The majority of the messages (69.4%) had a fundraising purpose. Other messages aimed to raise awareness (18.0%), to increase NGOs’ brand recognition (10.6%) or to thank donors (2.1%). The material did not constitute a representative sample of all advertisements of Dutch, British and Flemish development organisations: unlike newspaper articles, no such database exists. However, given the size of the collection and the diversity of the organisations, we expected the dataset to give a good impression of the recent NGO-messages in the mass media of these countries.

3.5.2 Coding the texts

 Coders received a detailed description of the frames and were asked to identify frames in the texts. As a tool, they used a list with interpretive questions to recognise the frames. For example, the question ‘Does the message contain descriptions of poor living conditions and hardships of people in developing countries?’ served as an identifier for the victim frame. The question ‘Does the message refer to leaders and elites in developing countries that abuse their power?’ referred to the presence of the bad governance frame. Coders were instructed to holistically code whether a frame was a ‘present’ or ‘absent’ (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). The objective was to identify the key frames in the message. Hence, for each newspaper article and NGO-advertisement, a maximum of two frames could be listed. When a third frame seemed to be present, the coder had to weigh the relative importance of the frames. He or she then followed a few rules of thumb, such as the rule that frames in the headline and lead should be given priority over frames further down in the text.

In addition to the questions about poverty frames, coders analysed how people from developing countries were depicted in the visual material. More specifically, coders determined whether the visuals explicitly emphasised human suffering. Such images were called ‘pitiful’. During the coding process, images were marked as ‘pitiful’ when the depicted people were visibly suffering from malnutrition, illness or hardship: crying, bleeding, dirty or sick. Hence, ‘pitiful images’ included the proverbial images of ‘children with hun-

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6 | The coding was performed between November 2013 and March 2014. Newspaper articles were coded by the researcher and six coders, all (former) students of communication at the Radboud University and the University of Wageningen. Newspaper photos were coded by the researcher and two assistants with a background in journalism and communications. NGO commercials were coded by the researcher, an intern of Partos and two students at the Institute of Media Studies of the Catholic University in Leuven.

7 | The coding scheme is available from the researcher on request.
ger bellies and flies in their eyes’, but also of injured people in war and disaster areas. Figure 3.1 and 3.2 give an example from the coding process. Figure 3.1 was coded as ‘not pitiful’: even though the girl’s look could be interpreted as slightly sad, she is not visibly suffering. On the other hand, Figure 3.2, of a naked and crying girl with a bandage on her head, was coded as ‘pitiful’.

Finally, the coders answered questions about the role of the West in solving the poverty issue. For that purpose, different questions were asked of the NGO-material and news articles. For news articles, coders first indicated whether the article suggested that someone was responsible for the solution or improvement of the situation. If the answer was ‘yes’, they stated whether this responsibility was located in developed countries, in developing countries, or whether it was a joint responsibility. For example, if an article discussed how international fora brokered climate or trade deals that could benefit poor countries, it was coded as ‘joint responsibility for the solution’. For the NGO-advertisements, coders indicated who, according to this advertisement, had the agency to change the situation: the NGO, the donor or the local citizens from developing country. For example, if a video clip showed a group of farmers who had formed a cooperative to increase their income, it was coded as ‘local agency’, even if that cooperation was established with aid from the NGO.

Ten per cent of the advertisements and thirteen per cent of the articles and photographs were double coded. As a measure of reliability we chose Krippendorff’s Alpha, a measure that corrects the percentage agreement for chance agreement (see Krippendorff, 1982). An Alpha of 0.60 was considered acceptable. The measures were as follows: News articles: victim frame: 0.68; progress frame: 0.77; social justice frame: 0.67; bad governance frame: 0.64; responsibility for solution: 0.69. News photos: pitiful images: 0.64; NGO-advertisements: poverty frames combined 0.78; pitiful images 0.79; agency for change: 0.63.

3.6 Results

3.6.1 Poverty frames in NGO-advertisements and news articles

Figure 3.3 and 3.4 show the frequency of poverty frames in NGO-advertisements and news articles by country. The results are illustrated with examples per frame. This answers our first and second research questions.

Victim frame

The victim frame was observed in 79 per cent of the British, 41 per cent of the Dutch and 38 per cent of the Flemish NGO-advertisements. The frame clearly dominated emergency aid appeals, made by NGOs such as the Red Cross, MSF and the Dutch Refugee Foundation (Stichting Vluchteling). Their requests reflected emergencies that also attracted much attention in the news media, such as the famine in the Sahel (2011), the typhoon in the Philippines (2013) and the war in Syria. In addition, but less frequently, the frame was used in advertisements that highlighted chronic poverty conditions in
developing countries, such as malnutrition, diseases and child mortality. For example, a commercial of WaterAid, a British NGO, showed a small African boy scooping a cup of water from a river. According to the voiceover, a child like him ‘dies every 40 seconds because of dirty water and poor sanitation’ (WaterAid, 2011).

The difference between the UK and the other two countries stood out: British NGOs applied a victim frame twice as often as their Dutch and Flemish counterparts. For example, video-advertisements of ActionAid, Concern, Save the Children and Sightsavers typically broadcast appeals with a dramatic storyline featuring malnourished and distressed children, and a grave sounding voiceover calling upon donors to help or save them. In the Dutch and Flemish material, such videos were an exception.

In newspapers, the victim frame was observed in respectively 31 per cent of the British and Flemish and 23 per cent of the Dutch articles. As expected, and as in NGO-campaigns, the frame was overrepresented in news about droughts, hunger and disaster, such as the abovementioned famine in the Sahel and the typhoon in the Philippines. Likewise, the frame was used in stories that highlighted chronic poverty problems in the South, especially in connection with health, education and children. An example is a story by NRC Handelsblad, a Dutch paper, with the headline ‘Unicef raises alarm about children in large cities’, highlighting the misery of poor children in slums (Chin-A-Fo, 2012).

In advertisements, we observed a similar picture. British NGOs used victim frames twice as often as the other two countries. For example, video-advertisements of HelpAge International, ActionAid, Save the Children and Sightsavers typically broadcast appeals with a dramatic storyline featuring malnourished and distressed children, and a grave sounding voiceover calling upon donors to help or save them. In the Dutch and Flemish material, such videos were an exception.

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Figure 3.3. Frequency of poverty frames (percentages) in NGO-advertisements in the UK (n=73), the Netherlands (n=169) and Flanders (n=42). Notes. The difference between countries is statistically significant, X^2(4, n=294) = 26.06, p<0.001. The total frequency of the frames per country can be more than 100 per cent, because some texts contained two frames.

Figure 3.4. Frequency of poverty frames (percentages) in newspaper articles in the UK (n=357), the Netherlands (n=289) and Flanders (n=230). Notes. The difference between countries is statistically significant, X^2(6, n=938) = 13.00, p=0.043. The total frequency of the frames per country can be more than 100 per cent, because some texts contained two frames.

* Advertisements with other/no frame: global village frame: UK 1%, NL 2%, FL 7%; blame us frame: UK 0%, NL 4%, FL 7%; no frame: UK 8%, NL 15%, FL 10%. Totals may differ from the sum in the figure due to rounding.

* Other/no frame: global village frame: UK 13%, NL 13%, FL 14%; blame us frame: UK 12%, NL 13%, FL 10%; no frame: UK 6%, NL 5%, FL 13%. Totals may differ from the sum in the figure due to rounding.
Progress frame

The progress frame was the most popular frame in newspaper articles (UK: 37%; the Netherlands: 49%; Flanders: 34%). Hence, a considerable proportion of news reports on global poverty was characterised by a focus on development, or the lack thereof. This was especially true for Dutch articles, which adopted this frame more frequently than the other countries. The progress frame often appeared in news with an economic angle of incidence, such as stories on economic development in Africa, fair trade or the rise of the IT sector in developing countries. For example, The Guardian ran a story that discussed whether poor countries’ economies would benefit from copying China’s export model (Stewart, 2011).

NGO-advertisements used the frame less frequently than newspapers, but it was still a fairly important frame in their communications (UK 21%; the Netherlands 25%; Flanders 26%). A difference with the news media was notable. While news media used this frame especially in economic news, NGOs used it primarily with regard to social issues, such as education, food security, and water and sanitation. In their advertisements, the frame highlighted the lack of development as well as the progress that could be made – with the help of donors. For example, a TV-advertisement of Oxfam Novib in the Netherlands portrayed an Indian woman who made it to village headwoman thanks to education with donor support (Oxfam Novib, 2012).

Social Justice frame

In NGO-advertisements in the Netherlands and Flanders, this frame was seen in a little over one third of the communications (35% and 36% respectively). In the UK, just 10 per cent of the NGO-ads applied this frame. The social justice frame was, not surprisingly, a popular frame for organisations that push for human rights for women, children, girls or people with disabilities. The frame was also visible in campaigns for better positions of farmers and workers in developing countries. For example, the Belgian NGO FOS campaigned for better working conditions of domestic servants, who are ‘treated like dirt’ and whose ‘labour rights are often violated’ (FOS, 2013).

In the newspaper data, the social justice frame was observed in 14 per cent of the Dutch, 13 per cent of the British and 11 per cent of the Belgian articles. As in NGO-campaigns, the frame featured in articles about working conditions and the position of women and children in developing countries. An example is a story by the Dutch NRC Handelsblad about women in Afghanistan (Van Straaten, 2011). It described their struggle for better access to health care and education and political influence. Nevertheless, the difference with the advertisements of development organisations stood out: While social justice was one of the key frames for NGOs in the Netherlands and Flanders, journalists less frequently shed light on the poverty issue from a perspective of human rights, justice and equality.

Bad Governance frame

The bad governance frame was virtually absent in NGO-advertisements. When those advertisements referred to bad leadership or conflicts, as in Syria, they mostly used a victim frame to draw attention to the affected citizens. In newspapers, however, this frame was used in about a quarter of the articles (UK: 27%; the Netherlands: 26%; Flanders: 23%). The bad governance frame was observed in political news and news about wars and violence, as (within the time frame of the study) in Syria, Mali, Central Africa, South Sudan and Congo. Occasionally, the frame drew attention to the role of governance in chronic poverty conditions and ‘natural disasters’, such as the drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011. An example of the latter was a story in the Dutch Volkskrant with the headline ‘Is hunger caused by drought?’ It argued that, besides crop failure, mismanagement of African leaders is one of the main causes of the crisis (Bossema, 2011).

3.6.2 The prevalence of ‘pitiful images’

The purpose of the third research question was to examine the frequency of explicit ‘pitiful images’ in the material. Figure 3.5 shows that explicit images of miserable people from developing countries were not omnipresent in the media. Newspapers in all three countries used such images sparingly (UK and the Netherlands: 9%; Flanders: 12%). In the NGO-material from the Netherlands and Flanders, the ‘pitiful poor person’ was seen in 14 per cent and 10 per cent of the messages respectively. Again, the difference with British NGOs was significant: they used pitiful images in 34 per cent of their advertisements, two to three times as often as their Dutch and Flemish counterparts.

Pitiful images were, as could be expected, most often observed in emergency relief campaigns and news articles on war and disasters. However, a closer look at the Dutch material revealed that even emergency campaigns were rather careful with the display of human suffering: the majority of them did not show explicit ‘pitiful’ images. It was also observed that the typical image of the ‘starving African child’ was rather rare. In the dataset, it was
displayed in 12 NGO-campaigns \((n=289)\), and 12 newspaper photos \((n=403)\). Each of these photographs or videos was taken during the drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011. Other ‘pitiful’ images included, for example, refugees from Congo, child labourers in a mine or people in the rubble in Syria.

### 3.6.3 Dependence on ‘the West’

The fourth research question concerned the portrayal of poor countries’ dependence on the West. Figure 3.6 shows that NGOs strongly reinforced this perception: only a small share of their advertisements demonstrated the initiative of the local population (UK 4%; the Netherlands 13%, Flanders 17%). An example was an advertisement of Kinderfonds Mamas, a Dutch NGO, in which we read that the South African ‘Agnes’, together with hundreds of volunteers, cares for disadvantaged children in Limpopo, South Africa. The advertisement called on donors to help women like Agnes, thereby emphasising that they are the agents of change. However, the vast majority of the advertisements solely highlighted the agency of the NGO (‘Plan provides education for girls’) or the donor (‘You can save a child’s live’). The ‘local agency’ was least visible in advertisements with a victim frame (5%) and social justice frame (10%), and most visible in those with a progress frame (34%).

Newspaper reports also reflected that the West does play a large role when it comes to solving the poverty issue (Figure 3.7). Approximately two thirds of the articles (68%) suggested a potential solution for the problem. About a quarter of these articles (UK: 27%; the Netherlands: 28%; Flanders: 22%) exclusively attributed the responsibility to governments, people or institutions in developing countries. These articles highlighted, for example, the responsibility of governments to end local conflicts or to implement appropriate policies. The remaining articles suggested that Western governments, institutions and companies should take action, for example through emergency aid for refugees, or they suggested that there was a joint responsibility of the West and the developing world. The emphasis on local responsibility for solving this issue was strongest in stories with a bad governance frame (42%).
and social justice frame (39%) and weakest in those with a victim frame (13%). The progress frame reflected (24%) the average score.

3.6.4 Differences between NGOs, news media, and countries

The previous questions about poverty framing and problematising representations already disclosed some differences between countries, and between NGOs and newspapers. This brings us to our hypothesis and last research question. First, we expected that NGOs would be more likely to use problematising representations than news media (H1). We thereby separately examined two characteristics of ’problematisation’: the presence of a victim frame and the depiction of ‘pitiful’ people. The third characteristic, ‘dependency on the West’, was not comparable because of the difference in questioning. Our findings partly support the hypothesis. NGOs used the victim frame significantly more often than newspapers, $X^2(3, n=1236) = 139.38$, $p<0.001$. By contrast, they did not use pitiful images significantly more often than newspapers, $X^2(1, n=687) = 2.99$, $p=0.084$.

Second, we asked a question about the differences between the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders (RQ5). We found that British NGOs used a victim frame and pitiful images significantly more often than Dutch and Flemish NGOs. Moreover, they attributed agency for change to local people significantly less often (see Figures 3.3, 3.5 and 3.6). The analysis of newspaper articles showed that the Dutch papers used a progress frame more frequently, and a victim frame less frequently than the other countries (see Figure 3.4). However, there was no significant difference between British, Dutch and Flemish newspapers with regard to the use of pitiful images (see Figure 3.5) and the attribution of responsibility for solutions (see Figure 3.7).

3.7 Discussion

The starting point of this study was the discussion about the representation of global poverty in the Western media. The research questions and hypothesis were aimed to gain specific insight into how poverty is framed, how problematising representations manifest themselves in a media content and who exactly contributes to it.

Our analysis of newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements challenges the idea that the media unilaterally portray people from the South as pitiful victims. NGOs in the Netherlands and Flanders, and newspapers in the Netherlands, Flanders and Britain choose a variety of frames to communicate about global poverty; they alternate the victim frame with progress, social justice and – in newspapers – bad governance. Moreover, the origin of ‘pitiful images’ appears to be related to newsworthy events, not specifically to Africa as such. However, British NGOs are an exception to this general finding. Contrary to their Dutch and Flemish counterparts, a large majority of their communications apply a victim frame and a large portion explicitly uses images of suffering, sick, malnourished or crying people.

While this study puts the use of explicit ‘victim portrayals’ in perspective, it confirms the idea that (people from) developing countries are predominantly portrayed as dependent on outside help or intervention. NGOs especially reinforce the South’s dependency on the West, rarely visualising the actions and initiatives of local people. This is mostly the case in communications with a victim frame, but the pattern is also true for communications with other frames. Hence, advertisements with a ‘progress’ or ‘social justice’ storyline also often suggest that Western donors or NGOs have to bring about progress, justice and equality in developing countries.

For news articles the finding is somewhat mixed. If articles suggest a solution, they mostly point at a sole responsibility of Western countries, or a joint responsibility of Western and developing countries. Hence, they attribute a significant responsibility to ‘the West’ when it comes to accomplishing change in developing countries. This is especially true for stories with a victim frame, which reflect the notion that the West must relieve the suffering in the South. However, stories with a bad governance frame more often point at the sole responsibility of local governments to take action, suggesting that they themselves are responsible for ending corruption, mismanagement and conflicts.

Using a quantitative framing analysis allowed us to present a nuanced picture of current poverty representations in the media. In conclusion, it appears that the problematising portrayal global poverty is most clearly carried out by NGOs, especially British NGOs. Furthermore, and in general, problematisation manifests itself especially in the portrayal of the poor as ‘dependent on the West’, and less obviously in the use of explicit visuals of human suffering.

However, this study has some limitations. First, the NGO-sample was rather small and not representative of the whole range of NGO-communications in the mass media. Second, the study did not address some important topics in the discussion about poverty representation. The most notable one is the debate on ‘complexity versus simplicity’, which questions the lack of context in both NGO-communications and news articles. According to cri-
tics, the media present issues in 'the global South' above all as a local problem, caused by internal factors such as drought, overpopulation and corruption. They fail to make reference to historical factors and obscure the role of the West in the emergence and continuation of global poverty (Dogra, 2012; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Tallon, 2008). It was beyond the scope of this study to empirically measure this 'complexity' dimension.

Still, the results raise some questions. An obvious question is why British NGOs show a greater preference for victim frames and pitiful images than their Dutch and Flemish counterparts. Potential explanations include a stronger charity culture in Britain and a fiercer competition between NGOs. This could motivate British NGOs to use more confrontational, emotive images to attract people's attention. More research is needed to interpret this difference, for example by analysing the differences between the countries in NGO- and campaigning culture.

Another question relates to the perception of the public that the media overload them with pitiful images from the poor. While this seems plausible in Britain, it is less clear why this would be the case, for example, in the Netherlands. One explanation is that vivid portrayals of poverty and hardship, for example of starving people in a famine, were frequently activated in the past and have become chronically accessible to us (Shrum, 2009). Hence, powerful problematising images easily surface when people think about developing countries, or when they are confronted with a victim frame, regardless of whether or not they actually see those explicit images.

The above limitations and questions indicate that the field could benefit from more empirical research into the media representation of global poverty. It could, for example, further investigate differences between countries, or study specific features of the messages, such as their profundity. This is at the service of another area of research that deserves attention: understanding the impact of media representations on public engagement with global poverty. Little is known, for example, about the extent to which media representations reinforce or undermine long-term support for development cooperation. In addition, our findings suggest that research could afresh the question to what extent 'pitiful images' are needed for fundraising. The wide use of such images by British NGOs suggests that they are indeed needed. However, the fact that Dutch and Flemish NGOs use them sparingly questions this premise.

Finally, this study has some implications for the future debate on the representation of global poverty. It suggests that the discussion about 'victim imagery' is still relevant for NGOs in the UK. However, it appears less significant for NGOs in the Netherlands and Flanders, and for newspapers. Instead, the emphasis should be on the media's portrayal of the global South's dependence on the West. NGOs could be questioned about the fact that they appreciate the importance of local initiative and local ownership, but hardly ever show this in their advertisements for the general public. It might be true that NGOs do display more examples of local initiatives in their newsletters and on their websites, which were not assessed in this study. However, the general public does not come across these messages without making a deliberate effort, while they are sure to be confronted with appeals in the mass media. If NGOs take the representation of local initiative seriously, they should also show it in their messages and appeals to the general public.

For news media, the message is less straightforward. Not every article that emphasised the responsibility of the West also reinforced the image of the South as 'dependent' in a problematising way. For example, a number of articles pointed at the responsibility of Western countries to mitigate the effects of climate change on the poorest people. The argument is that the West has greatly contributed to climate change and should therefore pay the bill. Such articles can clearly not be labelled as an undesirable portrayal of dependency of developing countries. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that local governments, leaders and citizens are the main agents for change in their own countries. Consequently, journalists should pay attention to their views, specifically with regard to solving problems. During the analysis it was observed that this perspective received little attention in the news articles: newspapers rarely published stories about successful or promising initiatives of governments in developing countries to tackle poverty, fight injustice or improve governance. Therefore, journalists could be encouraged, when applicable, to forward examples of local initiatives to change the situation for the better.
Media frames and public perceptions of global poverty in the UK: Is there a link?
4 Media frames and public perceptions of global poverty in the UK: Is there a link? 10

Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between media frames and public perceptions of global poverty. Building on a frame analysis, the paper reconstructs prevailing poverty narratives in British news articles and non-governmental organisations (NGO) advertisements between 2011 and 2013. Following this, these narratives are compared with the narratives that emerge from public opinion studies. The findings suggest that there is a strong connection between media frames and public knowledge and perceptions of global poverty. Both the media and the public define poverty in developing countries terms of destitute victims, lack of development and bad governance. Both suggest that the causes of poverty are internal to developing countries and imply that there has been little progress in reducing global poverty.

Keywords: news framing, framing effects, poverty, public opinion

4.1 Introduction

The majority of Europeans appear to have limited knowledge and understanding of the levels of poverty in developing countries. In 2013, a representative group of British respondents were asked whether they thought that the proportion of the world’s poorest had increased, decreased or remained more or less the same over the last 30 years. The correct answer, that extreme poverty had been reduced, was given by only 10% of the participants while 58% percent of the respondents were convinced that the poverty problem had grown worse (Rosling, 2013). Similar surveys in other European countries point in the same direction: people tend to misjudge the basic facts regarding poverty in developing countries. They not only misunderstand the trends in declining global poverty, but they also strongly underestimate the progress that has been made in health, education and fertility reduction (Danida, 2014; Gapminder, 2014; Motivaction, 2016).

This paper argues that the media play an important role in shaping public perceptions of poverty in developing countries. For most people, issues concerning poverty are at a considerable distance from their own daily lives and they primarily gather information about this topic from television, newspapers and the Internet (Henson, Lindstrom & Haddad, 2010; European Commission, 2015). This raises two questions. Firstly, how is global poverty represented by the media? And secondly, how do these representations relate to public attitudes towards the issue? Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the links between media coverage and public perceptions of poverty in developing countries.

A number of studies have investigated the representation of global poverty in the media (e.g., Bond, 2014; Cohen, 2001; Dogra, 2012; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). Some studies have focused explicitly on the coverage in the news media, others have explored the portrayal of global poverty by international development NGOs. The tone in these studies has been predominantly disapproving. Lugo-Ocando (2015), for example, criticised the news media’s preoccupation with conflicts, disasters and sensational events, and its failure to place the poverty issue into a political and historical perspective. He argued that the media misrepresents the structural cause of poverty, which according to him is inequality. In the same vein, Van Heerde and Hudson (2009, p. 396) argued that the news media expose their audience to a truncated treatment of the poverty issue with little attention to its causes and consequences.

NGOs, in turn, have been specifically criticised for their use of images of malnourished and suffering people for fundraising purposes (Dogra, 2012; Manzo, 2008). Scholars have argued that such images perpetuate the stereotypical narrative that people in developing countries are passive and helpless victims that need to be ‘saved’ by donations and assistance from the devel-
ped world. Moreover, such imagery reinforces the idea that the developing world is a vast and backward region that is in a perpetual state of misery.

This leads to the second question: how do media representations relate to public attitudes? In this context, we propose that both news media and NGOs are important information dispensers and therefore both contribute to media representations of global poverty (Dogra, 2012; European Commission, 2015; Glennie et al., 2012). The media’s contribution to raising awareness is evident, for example, after a disaster such as the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, whereby media reporting generated massive public support for the victims. However, recent research also highlights the detrimental effects of existent portrayals of global poverty by the media (Bond, 2014; Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). It is argued that the media’s ongoing focus on hunger, conflicts and disasters leaves the audience with feelings of hopelessness, the conviction that little progress has been made over time, and increased scepticism towards the effectiveness of development aid. Over a period of time, this may erode the engagement of European citizens with global poverty altogether.

This paper links existing concerns about media-influence on the engagement of Europeans with global poverty. It investigates the relationship between media representations of global poverty and public beliefs and opinions. Our assumption is that people develop their beliefs about poverty over a long period of time. We assume that cultivation effects occur as cultivation theory states that media use leads us to believe that the real world is like the mediated world (Bryant and Miron, 2004; Potter, 2012, p. 53). In the context of this study, we suspect that exposure to mediated messages about developing countries, which are rarely supplemented with personal experiences, may contribute to the belief that life over there looks exactly like the images in the media.

Public opinions about global poverty are not a result of immediate media effects, but of a continuous exposure to repeated media messages over time. These long-term effects of media exposure are not directly observable and therefore difficult to measure (Potter, 2012, p. 55-56). What is more, once effects do become observable, for example, when people express their beliefs in an opinion poll, it is difficult to attribute them to media-exposure. Other factors, such as personal characteristics and sociological factors, mediate the creation of perceptions (Valkenburg et al., 2016).

Rather than providing evidence of the media effects on public beliefs, this paper aims to map out the relation between the two. While a large body of literature suggests that media has an impact on public beliefs about global poverty, little is known about the connections between them. An exception is an investigation by Bond (2014) of 2000 articles in the British press between July 2011 and June 2013. In addition, a group of 26 people was closely monitored over the course of six weeks and asked about their media experiences with and thoughts about global poverty. The findings suggest that there is a strong link between media coverage and audience perceptions. For instance, the media gave particular prominence to government corruption in relation to poverty in developing countries. This was reflected in the responses from the audience, who identified corruption as a major cause and consequence of poverty.

This paper expands on this existing study by examining how the issue of global poverty is represented in the media and combines it with data from public opinion studies. It asserts that both news media and NGOs can shape people’s perceptions and aims to investigate the similarities between the two.

First, we conduct an analysis of poverty frames in recent news articles and NGO-advertisements. Secondly, we review existing public opinion studies to explore the presence of these media frames in public attitudes on the topic (see also Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Shah, Watts, Domke & Fan, 2002). Finally, we discuss the implications for journalists and NGOs.

This study is interested in observing the more or less solid beliefs of the general public. We have chosen therefore a period of three years to ensure that observed opinions are not heavily influenced by one-off events that attracted a lot of media-attention, such as a famine or disaster, which may cause a short-term fluctuation change effect (Potter, 2012, p. 55). The United Kingdom was chosen as a case study because the public attitudes towards global poverty and development are relatively widely studied in the UK compared to other European countries.

Our study presents aggregate results of the media coverage and public opinions regarding global poverty, hence, it does not account for differences in framing between newspapers and individual differences in perception, such as differences between various age groups. Moreover, our study of media content is limited to newspaper articles, while acknowledging that people also glean their knowledge about developing countries from other sources, such as TV and social media.
4.2 Representing global poverty

4.2.1 Framing

We use a frame analysis to study the media content and public beliefs regarding global poverty. Framing, in a broad sense, suggests how an audience should think about a topic. Frames attribute meaning to an issue. They highlight certain aspects and intimate how the issue should be interpreted (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Building frames involves the choice of topics, arguments, causal reasoning, catchwords, visuals and exemplars that communicate to the audience how the issue should be understood. For example, Bullock, Fraser Wyche, and Williams (2001) investigated how the media framed local poverty in the US. They found that the media often connected poverty to the personality traits of the poor by emphasising their laziness and irresponsibility, and using negative catchphrases such as ‘welfare queens’ to typify single black mothers on social assistance.

To operationalise frames we use a conceptualisation by Entman (1993), who defined the functions of framing in a communicating text. According to Entman, the function of a frame is to ‘promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (p. 52). In other words, frames on the issue of poverty tell us what is at stake, what caused poverty, which moral values are involved and how and by whom poverty should be solved. In addition, we conceptualise frames not as purely individual constructs, but as a part of a shared culture. Frames belong to a set of shared stories, world-views and beliefs with which a large group of people are familiar. Hence, both journalists and their audience are accustomed to the same set of frames. Journalists and other communicators use them to construct stories while the audience uses them to interpret a message.

4.2.2 Global poverty frames

We used a set of six predetermined frames to assess the framing of global poverty (Vossen and Van Gorp, 2017). A strict procedure was followed to inductively detect these frames (for an overview of the applied methodology, see Van Gorp, 2007, 2010). The first step was to gather a selection of documents that contained a wide variation of viewpoints about global poverty. These texts included, for example, books on development cooperation, party programs, and websites of development organisations. In this material, ‘framing elements’ were detected and brought together in a matrix. Framing elements consist of words and sentences that tell us about the essence of poverty, its causes and consequences, solutions and moral values (Entman, 1993). Related elements were grouped until the matrix showed a limited number of distinctive frames. Each frame bore a unique description of the essence of poverty, its causes and consequences, the moral values involved, and the potential solutions. Table 4.1 gives a description of the frames.

Table 4.1. Global poverty frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>The poor are innocent victims of tragic circumstances. They suffer from hunger, diseases and conflicts. The frame makes a strong moral appeal to the rich to help the needy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress</td>
<td>Poverty is a lack of development. Poor people and countries need to catch up with the rich world. Solutions lie in economic development, and advancements in health care, education, food production and infrastructure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>Poverty is injustice and inequality. Societies are organised in an unfair way which denies the poor freedom and chances. Solutions lie in a fair distribution of wealth and equal access to opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Governance</td>
<td>Poverty is linked to failing governance in poor countries. Leaders and elites behave irresponsibly and contribute to corruption, fraud and conflicts. Solving poverty requires improving local institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame Us</td>
<td>The rich world harms the poor world: Through colonisation and slavery in the past, nowadays through exploitation and unfair trade systems. The solution to global poverty lies in the West.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Village</td>
<td>In a globalising world all people and countries are interconnected. Rich and poor countries alike have a mutual responsibility to tackle cross-border issues, which disproportionally affect the poorest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Vossen & Van Gorp, 2017

An additional point is worth noting at this stage. Our study links up with criticisms of stories that merely problematise the situation in developing countries. For this reason, we want to assess the extent to which such a ‘problematising portrayal’ is reflected in news articles and NGO-advertisements. However, a frame in itself does not always disclose whether a message is positively or negatively charged. For instance, the progress frame can be used to talk about a lack of schools and teachers in developing countries (problematising). Conversely, the frame can also be used to highlight the advancements
in developing countries, such as increased school enrolment (de-problematising). We will refer to this ‘problematising’ or ‘de-problematising’ emphasis as the ‘tone of voice’ in the message.

Our objective here is not simply to count the frequency of the frames or framing elements and the frequency of problematising messages. Rather, our aim is to look for patterns in the media coverage with regard to the framing, the tone of voice, and the attention given to causes, remedies and responsibility for the solution. In this respect, infrequently used perspectives are just as important as frequently used perspectives (Entman, 1993, p. 54). We will refer to these patterns as the overarching narrative. In conclusion, our objective is to reconstruct the overarching global poverty narrative in the media and public opinion which highlight prevailing as well as underexposed perspectives on poverty. From this we derive the following research questions:

RQ1 What is the overarching narrative regarding global poverty in news articles and NGO-advertisements?

RQ2 What is the overarching narrative regarding global poverty in public opinion and how does it relate to the narrative of the media?

4.3 Method

4.3.1 Data collection

We used three datasets for our analysis all originating from the UK: newspaper articles, NGO-advertisements and public opinion studies. We selected articles from a mix of broadsheet, mid-market and tabloid papers, with a political orientation ranging from centre right to centre left (The Guardian; The Daily Telegraph; The Times; The Sun; The Daily Mirror respectively). The search was undertaken with LexisNexis and the articles had been published from January 2011 to December 2013. Our search terms were derived from the frame descriptions and included words such as ‘poverty’, ‘development’, ‘aid’, ‘hunger’ and ‘dictator’. The search was confined to stories about countries that are on the OECD-DAC list of developing countries (OECD, 2013). Our initial search returned 5,609 articles. After the removal of irrelevant stories (for example about football in Africa), 1,984 articles remained.

From these we randomly selected every fifth article. We evaluated the articles again for their relevance, and finally 357 articles remained for analysis.

Our second dataset consisted of 73 NGO-advertisements from 24 British development organisations which had been published or broadcast between January 2011 and December 2013. Our purpose was to examine the messages about poverty with which the audience had come into contact coincidentally, that is, without making any special effort. Our search was therefore limited to messages in the mass media, such as television and radio advertisements and advertisements in print media. The data collection started with large NGOs that regularly conduct media campaigns. The membership list of Bond, the NGO-umbrella organisation, served as a starting point. Part of the material was given or sent to the researchers by NGOs, part was retrieved through the internet, for example through the organisation’s website or YouTube channel. The sample is not representative; there is no overview of all published NGO-advertisements, so the drawing of a reliable sample is impossible. However, given the size of the collection and the variety of organisations in our sample, we expect that our collection is a reasonable reflection of the advertisements that were distributed in this period.

Our third and final dataset consisted of studies into public attitudes, opinions and the level of knowledge of the British public regarding global poverty and development issues. Our goal was to bring together all the studies on the data collected between 2011 and 2013. In addition, two representative surveys from 2010 were included. Our dataset contained nine studies, conducted or commissioned by Bond, the European Commission, Gapminder, TNS, ODI and YouGov (see Table 4.2). We utilised both quantitative and qualitative studies. This was a deliberate choice. It has been argued that survey tools are not well suited to examine attitudes towards complex issues, of which global poverty is an example (Carabain, 2007; Glennie, Straw & Wild, 2012; Hudson & van Heerde-Hudson, 2012). Surveys, for instance, often inquire about respondents’ levels of agreement with a certain statement, thereby failing to expose ambivalence towards an issue. Moreover, specific wording of questions and statements may influence people’s answers. Such limitations can be partly overcome by qualitative research, for example, interviews or focus group discussions, which offer more scope for nuance and depth. We therefore expect the involvement of both types of research to increase the validity of our analysis. However, this comes at the expense of providing exact percentages: we will not be able to state, on the basis of qualitative studies, that a certain percentage of the people endorse a certain vision. Hence, our...
investigation of public opinion studies will merely allow us to detect recurring themes and patterns.

Table 4.2. Overview of public opinion studies into British people's attitudes towards international development between 2010-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>TNS UK</td>
<td>Public Attitudes Towards Development</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Corruption perceptions; causes of poverty; actions of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
<td>Europeans, development aid and the Millennium Development Goals</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Challenges of developing countries; desired policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
<td>Making a difference in the world: Europeans and the future of development aid</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Consumer behaviour; desired policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>IPPR/ODI</td>
<td>Understanding public attitudes to aid and development</td>
<td>Focus groups*</td>
<td>Perceptions of poverty and aid; responsibility for solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>YouGov</td>
<td>What causes extreme poverty in developing countries</td>
<td>Online query</td>
<td>Causes of poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Gapminder</td>
<td>Highpoints from the ignorance survey</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Knowledge of poverty related issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
<td>EU Development Aid and the Millennium Development Goals</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Knowledge of number of poor; consumer behaviour; post 2015 development policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Bond</td>
<td>Change the record and focus groups</td>
<td>Tracking study</td>
<td>Causes of poverty; solutions to poverty; role of governments; corruption perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Bond</td>
<td>Aid Attitudes tracker Wave 1 results</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Corruption perceptions; ways of delivering aid; actions of government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: all surveys in this overview were representative surveys
* Participants of these focus groups reflected the middle ground; strong opponents and enthusiasts of development cooperation were excluded.

4.3.2 Coding the news articles and NGO-advertisements

The coding of the newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements was carried out by nine coders who had undergone intensive preparation. They were familiarised with the frames and asked to identify them in the material. As a guideline, they used a list with interpretative questions with which to detect the presence of a frame. For example, the question, 'Does the message give examples of progress or decline in developing countries?' indicated the presence of the progress frame. The question, 'Does the message suggest that the problems are caused by bad leadership or bad governance?' was an indicator of the bad governance frame.

After reading, viewing, or listening to each text carefully coders holistically coded whether one of the frames was present (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). They could record up to two frames. When they discovered more frames, they noted the most important ones. These were, for instance, the frames that appeared in the headline and lead, or the frames that were used most often in the subparagraphs. When none of the frames were present, they coded 'no frame.' This was the case, for example, in short and completely factual news articles. Next, coders answered a question about the tone of voice of the message. More specifically, they indicated whether the article or advertisement merely problematised the situation, or whether it (also) paid attention to positive developments and advancements. For newspaper articles, the answers were coded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strong emphasis on problems' to 'strong emphasis on achievements.' When both sides were equally highlighted, the message was coded as 'balanced.' Articles with an emphasis on problems, for example, reported troubled elections, refugees on the run or the exploitation of labourers. Articles with an emphasis on positive developments, for example, paid attention to economic growth in developing countries or gave examples of successful development interventions.

For NGO-advertisements, the question was phrased slightly differently. Coders answered whether the advertisement mentioned achievements or displayed tangible results, for instance, by showing how previous interventions had improved people's lives. The answers were coded on a three-point Likert scale ranging from 'yes,' to 'a little' to 'no.' Some of the advertisements (10%) and news articles (13%) were double coded. For the nominal variables, Krippendorff’s Alpha was used as a measure of reliability. This measure corrects the percentage of agreement between the coders for chance agreement (see Krippendorff, 1982). Spearman’s rho was used as the measure for the Likert scale whereby an Alpha or
rho of 0.60 was considered acceptable. The measures were as follows. **News articles:** victim frame: 0.68; progress frame: 0.77; social justice frame: 0.67; bad governance frame: 0.64; blame us/global village frame: 0.69; emphasis on problems/advancements: 0.67. **NGO-advertisements:** poverty frames combined: 0.78; displaying results: 0.71.

### 4.3.3 Coding the public opinion studies

Coding the public opinion studies was less straightforward than coding the media content. First, the studies at hand were not mutually comparable. This applied to both qualitative and quantitative investigations. Secondly, the primary objective of most studies was to measure people’s attitudes towards (government) development aid. Questions about their attitudes towards the poverty issue in general played a secondary role. Consequently, many of the questions were not relevant for our study.

Therefore, the analysis took place in two phases. During the first phase we separated out the relevant questions and answers from each study (see also Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The ‘framing functions’ of Entman (1993) served as a guideline: we selected questions and answers that concerned people’s opinions regarding the definition of the problem, causes, effects and solutions to global poverty. For example, the answers to the question, ‘What are, in your view, important causes of poverty?’ would be selected. The answers to the question, ‘Should your government increase or decrease the budget for development aid?’ would not be selected. In addition, we included questions that tested people’s knowledge about poverty-related issues or asked about their general perception of the situation in developing countries.

In the second phase, we coded the responses of the selected questions. This was carried out by two coders. For this purpose the same coding scheme was used as in the analysis of news articles and NGO-advertisements. The word ‘message’ was replaced by ‘respondents.’ For example, the question, ‘Does the message suggest that the problems are caused by bad leadership or bad governance?’ would be altered to, ‘Do the respondents suggest that the problems are caused by bad leadership or bad governance?’

During the coding it was observed that many surveys used prompt lists to expose the opinions of the public. These lists often omitted certain categories of answers. For instance, when asking about solutions to poverty, the lists did not include items that referred to a change of behaviour in the West, hence, the lists themselves generated a certain framing of the answers. This shortcoming was overcome by also using qualitative research in which participants were asked to respond spontaneously.

Survey results were judged somewhat differently from the qualitative studies. Surveys often generated a table or graph depicting the frequency of various answers. Answers that occurred most frequently were regarded as an indicator of the presence of audience frames. For example, a TNS-survey (2010) asked respondents about the main causes of poverty. The most frequent response (56%) was ‘corrupt leaders/governments’ which was subsequently linked with a bad governance audience frame. When reviewing qualitative studies, the coders looked for indications such as ‘significant finding during the workshop,’ ‘large number of respondents,’ and ‘numerous references’ in order to confirm audience frames. In this way, recurring frames and framing elements in the public’s opinion were exposed, which were then compared with the frames in the news articles and NGO-campaigns.

### 4.4 Results

**4.4.1 Global poverty narratives in news articles and NGO-advertisements in the UK**

**Overall global poverty frame: Victims, (under)development and bad governance**

The UK-news media considered global poverty through three predominant perspectives: the (lack of) development, innocent victims, and bad governance (see Table 4.3). The (lack of) development was emphasised through the progress frame, which was used in 37% of the news articles and 26% of the NGO-advertisements. News articles reported, for instance, the influence of China on Africa’s economy or the advancement of green energy in developing countries. In particular within NGO-advertisements, the progress frame was used to highlight specific aid programmes, for example, to improve education or food production. News articles and NGO-advertisements with this frame had an equivalent problematising and de-problematising tone of voice.

The second predominant perspective, that of innocent victims, was by far the most important in NGO-advertisements (79%). These messages highlighted the deplorable circumstances of people in developing countries due to hunger, disease and wars. The victim frame was not only used in emergency appeals after crisis and disasters, but also in messages that drew attention to chronic poverty conditions, such as the lack of clean water and malnutrition.
In newspapers, the victim frame was seen in nearly one-third of the stories (31%). The frame was mostly used in a problematising context of disasters, wars and refugee flows, such as the crisis in the Horn of Africa in 2011 and the ongoing war in Syria.

The third important perspective in newspapers was bad governance (27%). It linked global poverty to incompetent leadership, corruption and local conflicts. The bad governance frame was used often in articles with a political news angle, and the tone of voice was almost invariably problematising. In contrast to the news articles, the bad governance frame was virtually absent in NGO-messages. If their advertisements were linked to political conflicts, as in Syria, they portrayed the victims rather than making inferences about failing leadership.

During the analysis, attention was also given to frames that were used less frequently and thus pointed to seldom referenced perspectives in the media. Three frames, social justice, blame us, and global village, were observed in only 12 to 13% of newspaper articles and in 0 to 10% of the NGO-advertisements (see Table 4.3). The social justice frame regards injustice and inequality as the root causes of poverty. Stories with this frame draw attention to the violation of rights or people living in poverty. A few NGOs used the frame, for instance, in campaigns against child marriage. This frame was also seen in some news articles regarding, for example, the exclusion of people with disabilities and the rift between the middle class and the chronically poor in developing countries.

The other sparingly used frames – blame us and global village – have in common an emphasis upon the accountability of the West for the poverty in developing countries. Blame us asserts that the rich world harms the poor world. It was seen, for example, in news stories about the collapse of a factory in Bangladesh that produced clothes for the Western market. In the same vein, global village turns the attention to the West, by pointing at the joint responsibility of rich and poor countries for the resolution of global issues. It appeared, for instance, in some news stories about the mitigation of global warming. These frames were practically absent in NGO-advertisements.

### Internal causes, external solutions

Both news stories and NGO-advertisements suggested that the origins of poverty were located in developing countries. Hardly any of the NGO-advertisements made explicit references to the causes of the problem. Few explanations were given as to why there were food shortages, diseases or abandoned children. Destitution in developing countries was presented as a given, for example, with phrases like ‘In Africa, 8 children will die this very minute’ (Action Aid, 2013). The NGO-advertisements therefore merely highlighted the tragic consequences of this ‘reality’ for people living in poverty.

Newspapers wrote about the causes of poverty more often. During the analysis, it was observed that approximately two-thirds of the articles cited a cause and in most of these stories the blame was put on local governments in developing countries. Newspapers often linked the causes of poverty to mismanagement, corruption and local conflicts in developing countries.

While both newspapers and NGOs suggested that the causes of poverty were predominantly located in developing countries, they both implied that the solution should first and foremost come from the developed world. About two-thirds of the newspaper articles suggested a remedy to improve the situation and the majority of those articles pointed at the responsibility of Western governments and institutions. They suggested that donor countries and international organisations should take action, for instance, through emergency relief to refugees, development assistance or literally paying for the consequences of climate change. Similarly, NGO-advertisements, most of whom had a fundraising purpose, suggested that the NGOs and the donating public were the agents of change. Advertisements communicated that NGOs could save lives, provide clean drinking water and cure diseases with the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Newspapers (%)</th>
<th>NGOs (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Governance</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame Us</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Village</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No frame</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the figures represent the percentage of all articles/advertisements on global poverty using a particular frame. The percentages add up to more than 100% because a message may contain multiple frames.
support of the British public. It was noted that few advertisements mentioned how the local population were themselves taking action to improve their lives.

**Advancements in developing countries**

A story that received little attention was that of advancements in developing countries. The tone of voice in the media was mostly negative (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). In news articles, 64 per cent had a negative tone of voice opposed to 19 per cent that underscored advancements, progressions and results. In NGO-advertisements, 63 per cent made no reference to what had been accomplished and sufficed to mention existing needs. Negativity was, self-evidently, strongest in news articles and appeals about hunger, conflicts and refugees. However, it was noted that most news articles about social issues such as health, education, agriculture and children also emphasised problems rather than advances. This finding stood out because studies show that much progress is being made in these areas. For example, over the past 25 years, child mortality in developing countries has declined by more than half and school enrolments have increased to 91 per cent (http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals). However, these positive trends were not reflected in the newspaper coverage. Similarly, NGO-advertisements rarely communicated any tangible results of their own projects and programmes in these areas.

In addition, there was virtually no coverage of ‘good’ or ‘responsible’ local governance in the media. The ‘bad governance’ narrative was rarely countered by examples of discontinued conflicts, peace and better governance in general. Consequently, newspapers reflected the narrative that good governance in developing countries does not exist. Development organisations, as previously stated, avoided the ‘governance’ topic altogether.

**4.4.2 The public narrative regarding poverty in developing countries**

**Poverty is linked to destitution, corruption, and a lack of basic needs**

When asked to consider the situation in developing countries, the first things that came to people’s minds were poverty, hunger, conflicts and barren, rural African landscapes. The poor were thereby regarded as passive and helpless with little agency to change their situation (Bond, 2014; Glennie et al., 2012). When asked to expand upon the causes of poverty, people primarily explained it as a result of internal, localised problems such as a lack of clean water, food, access to health care and education, and corruption. Bad governance was also frequently mentioned as a cause of poverty (Bond, 2014; Glennie et al., 2012; TNS, 2010). For instance, in a survey by TNS (2010), 56 per cent of the respondents spontaneously mentioned ‘corrupt leaders/governments’ as the main cause of poverty. Then came ‘lack of education’, which was mentioned by 23 per cent of the respondents.

These public perceptions corresponded to the dominant narratives in the media in which innocent victims, the lack of development, and bad governance were prominent themes. Moreover, public perception that the causes of poverty within developing countries were largely internal was also in line with the dominant narrative in the media.

**Poverty is also linked to our behaviour**

Even though the public located the causes of poverty as mainly in developing countries, some studies found that people also considered the connections between the Western world and developing countries and their effects upon global poverty. They referred, for example, to ‘historical injustices as contributing to poverty and underdevelopment’ (Glennie et al., 2012, p. 16). Moreover, 60 per cent of the British public said they were willing to pay a little more for products originating from developing countries (European Com-
mission, 2013). This indicates that there is some awareness of the interconnectedness between consumer culture in the West and poverty in developing countries. Little reference, however, was made to the current global order and the role of dominant international companies and organisations (YouGov, 2012). This perspective was also infrequently referenced in the media.

‘Nothing has changed’

The British public appeared to have a strong sense that there has been no progress in reducing poverty developing countries. This was strongly reflected in qualitative research: people were convinced that nothing had changed over the past decades and emphasised this with comments such as, ‘(people) keep on seeing the same adverts on the telly with no improvement’ (Glennie et al., 2012, p. 14). This sense of stagnation was also reflected in survey questions about the situation in developing countries in which people were asked to make an estimate on some real world indicators of global poverty. A Eurobarometer survey found that only 8 per cent of the British respondents correctly guessed that the number of extremely poor was between 500 million and 1 billion: 73 per cent overestimated the number, while 3 per cent underestimated it (European Commission, 2013). Moreover, the British misjudged major trends in declining poverty, such as the proportion of people living in poverty, literacy rates and life expectancy (Rosling, 2013). For example, only 10 per cent knew that the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has declined over the past 30 years. These misperceptions corresponded with the media narrative which paid little attention to positive developments and ‘slow progress’ in developing countries. In short, both NGOs and newspapers reported very little on progress; the public didn’t think there had been any progress.

Local governments should solve poverty – but they cannot be trusted

When people were asked to spontaneously come up with solutions to global poverty, it proved difficult for them to give coherent answers. One study talked about ‘a scattergun list of contrasted, unconnected ideas’, ranging from ‘cancelling debt, to women’s rights, to ending conflict’ (Bond, 2014, p. 17). When confronted with prompt lists, people favoured tangible remedies such as investments in education, health care or development projects in general (TNS, 2010).

However, while people had disparate ideas about what needed to be done, they had a rather clear idea about who should take action. On the one hand, people felt that local governments had an important responsibility with regard to solving the poverty issue (Glennie et al., 2012). On the other hand, they thought it was a very bad idea to actually give money to these governments because they were too corrupt. For example, only 3 per cent of the British public thought that their government giving money to the governments of poor countries was a good idea (Black, 2014). Another study concluded that the solution to poverty was to bypass local governments and give resources and finances to the people who need them (Bond, 2014, p. 21). This is in line with the strong perceptions of corruption and wastage that were reflected throughout the public opinion studies. For example, 73 per cent of the British public believed that ‘a lot of overseas aid (…) ends up in the pockets of corrupt officials’ (Black, 2014, p. 26) and 53 per cent agreed that ‘most financial aid to poor countries is wasted’ (TNS, 2010, p. 28).

Consequently, the British public thought that Western donors and multilateral organisations should play a key role in tackling poverty in developing countries as they could be better trusted to spend the money effectively. Local citizens in developing countries were not given an important role: the public perceived them as having little knowledge or agency (Glennie et al., 2012).

In conclusion, the public distrust of local leadership in developing countries corresponds with the portrayal of local governance in the news media. Similarly, the public, newspapers and NGO-advertisements suggested that Western donors and institutions were best equipped to alleviate the suffering and boost development in developing countries.

4.5 Discussion

This research compared the narratives regarding global poverty in British news articles and NGO-advertisements with the public narrative. Our conclusion is that the public narrative largely corresponds with the media narrative. Both narratives define poverty as a localised problem, characterised by destitution, a shortage of basic needs and a lack of development. More specifically, the news media advance the narrative of bad governance in developing countries which is reflected in strong public perceptions of corruption and little confidence in local governments in developing countries. In addition, NGOs in particular narrate the story of destitute victims that need to be helped by ‘us’ which is mirrored in the public’s preference for tangible solutions offered by Western donors. Both the media and the public pay relatively little atten-
tion to perspectives of justice and equality, and the liability of the West for the poverty of the developing world.

Having identified a relationship between media coverage and public perceptions, the question is the extent to which the media shape people’s viewpoints. To begin with, we do not argue that the media are the only or even the strongest driving force in the formation of public perceptions. A host of factors intervene in this process such as existing knowledge, personal values, and social environment (see for example Valkenburg, Peter & Walther, 2016). Moreover, people are exposed to a wider variety of media frames than are examined here, for example through television and the Internet. Finally, our findings in themselves do not prove the direction of the correlation between media narratives and public narratives. We do not know if the public constructs poverty narratives because they are in the news. It is also possible that the media reflects the existing ideas and beliefs of the public. Given that journalists themselves are part of the public and have their own beliefs on this subject, it seems likely that there is at least some interplay.

We argue, however, that the media are a powerful force in this interplay. Our first reason to assume that the media shape public perceptions is because the public say they do. In several studies, people discussed the role of the media and widely acknowledged that media coverage influenced their views on developing countries and their feelings towards extreme poverty (Bond, 2014; Glennie et al., 2012). Secondly, both news media and NGOs have specific objectives that compel them to present a specific version of reality in developing countries. The primary objective of NGO-advertisements is to raise funds for development interventions. This objective therefore incites them to highlight the misery, low standard of living and dependence of people in the developing world. News media, in turn, are predisposed to report about problems and to hold power to account, rather than to report about things that are improving. Consequently, their coverage is skewed towards conflicts, bad governance, disasters and misery in general.

In conclusion, we argue that the media contribute to public perceptions of bad governance, enduring misery and the persistent idea that ‘we’ need to help ‘them.’ This is problematic for two reasons. First, it reinforces stereotypical images of developing regions as dependent, backward and stagnant. Secondly, it undermines long-term engagement with global poverty and support for international development. If people come to believe that no progress is being made in developing countries, they may conclude that cooperating in development has not been very effective (Bond, 2014).

However, our study also suggests that news media and NGOs have the ability to modify public perceptions. Journalists could question their one-sided focus on bad news and find ways to pay attention to positive trends; not by treating them as single news events, for example, after the publication of a study about declining child mortality, but as a structural part of their reporting. Moreover, they could use a greater variety of frames, and highlight poverty more often from the perspective of justice, global interconnectedness and the role of the West. This too could contribute to a broader public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and its remedies. NGOs, in turn, could think critically about their own contribution to perceptions of helplessness and enduring misery. This study suggests that other frames, such as progress and social justice, could be less stereotyping than the victim frame. More importantly, it suggests that NGOs, as well as news media, should not only use the mass media to expose existing needs, but also to communicate achievements.

The current framing study connected media frames and public perceptions on a societal level. As such, it could serve as a model for similar investigations into the linkages between the mediated reality and people’s minds. Topics could include, for example, the debate on refugees, the future of the European Union and climate change. This would not only help to better understand the media’s contribution to public opinion formation, it would also enrich the field of framing research with studies beyond the level of media content analyses.
Thinking and Writing about Global Poverty: A comparison of journalist frames and media frames
5 Thinking and Writing about Global Poverty: A comparison of journalist frames and media frames

Abstract: Journalistic coverage informs audiences about poverty in developing countries. However, little is known about the contribution of individual journalists to the frame building of this topic. This study explores the cognitive frames of 54 journalists from the Netherlands who regularly write about the issue. The results are compared with the media frames in their articles. Additionally, the study identifies factors that influence the frame building process. The findings suggest that journalists’ cognitive frames are weak predictors of the frames in their articles. According to the journalists, the framing of their stories is specifically influenced by news values and sources.

Keywords: cognitive frames; frame analysis; frame building; global poverty; journalists, media routines

5.1 Introduction

For most Western people, poverty in developing countries is on the edge of their fields of interest. They are not in touch with the topic in their daily lives and consequently, they must glean their knowledge from television, newspapers and the Internet (Henson, Lindstrom, & Haddad, 2010; European Commission, 2015). These media representations influence the way the public comes to understand this issue. Moreover, it informs people’s opinions about the causes, consequences and remedies for ending poverty (Bond, 2014; Glennie, Straw, & Wild, 2012).

Existing studies of media representations of poverty in developing countries (hereafter: global poverty) have predominantly explored the media content itself (e.g., Bond, 2014; Cohen, 2001; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009; Vossen, Van Gorp, & Schulpen, 2016). The tone of these studies is mixed. On the one hand, there is acclaim for the fact that the media draw attention to disasters, poverty and inequality. On the other hand, there is criticism of the news media’s emphasis on the misery and lack of progress in developing countries and the portrayal of its inhabitants as passive and dependent (Bond, 2014; Vossen, Van Gorp & Schulpen, 2016). Moreover, the media have been criticised for presenting the causes of poverty predominantly as internal to developing countries, paying little attention to historical perspectives and global inequality (Bond, 2014; Lugo-Ocando, 2015).

To increase understanding of media portrayals of global poverty, it is important to investigate how they are produced. While the debate about existing media representations of global poverty and their impact on the public is ongoing, little attention has been given to the influence of individual journalists. It is assumed that journalists play a pivotal role in the social construction of knowledge (Bond, 2014; Engesser & Brüggemann, 2015). They shape their stories through the specific choice of topic, approach, storyline and the aspects they emphasise – a process that is known as framing – and thereby feed the public a version of reality. Schudson (1995, p. 19) asserted that ‘journalists add something to every story they run’.

However, little is known about what they add and to what extent their personal views influence the framing of articles on global poverty. Previous studies are mainly focused on the comparison between journalistic ‘role perceptions’, such as ‘being a critical watchdog’, and the enactment of these roles in their articles (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2013; Van Dalen, De Vreese, & Albæk, 2012). These studies generally point at gaps between beliefs and practice. However, it is less clear whether there is such a gap between journalist’s personal views on a topic and frames as they are reflected in the news. Several studies suggest that journalists, to some extent, impose their own frames to the stories they write (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Engesser & Brüggeman, 2015; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). However, none of them has empirically tested the connection between journalists’ ‘frame preferences’ and media content.
The aim of the paper is to investigate the minds of journalists and to compare their perceptions of the poverty issue with the frames in their news articles. We acknowledge that this writing process is not an isolated event and is affected by a variety of factors that intermediate the perceptions of individual journalists (Shoemaker & Reese 1996, 2014). The paper’s scientific contribution is that it is an example of a comparison between journalists conceptions and news articles on an individual level.

We chose to investigate a limited but specific group of journalists, namely print media journalists from the Netherlands. The media landscape in the Netherlands is relatively small and compact, making it possible to identify all the journalists who regularly write about poverty in developing countries. For the sake of clarity, we will refer to them throughout the paper as ‘the journalists’.

5.2 Media frames and journalist frames

Frames are central organising ideas that attribute meaning to the world around us (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Gitlin, 1980). They are not purely individual, but they emerge in a wider social and political context. Hence, they are part of a broader, cultural repository from which both sender and receiver can draw (Goffman, 1974; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; D’Angelo, 2002; Van Gorp, 2007). Framing occurs at various locations and in various stages of the communication process. For example, framing occurs in newsrooms when journalists demarcate a topic and define an angle for their article. It takes place at home or other locations when readers digest a story and connect it to their prior knowledge and values. And it occurs in society at large, where frames contribute to the shaping of the public opinion or encourage collective action (De Vreese, 2005; Entman, 1993). This study is primarily focused on the frame building process within the newsroom.

For the purposes of our study, it is important to distinguish between cognitive frames in the minds of journalists and frames as they are embedded in news articles. Cognitive frames can be conceived of as individual mental models or schemata that people use to interpret the world around them. Such mental models refer to what someone believes to be the most salient aspect of an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010). These cognitive frames will be further referred to as journalist frames (see also Engesser & Brüggemann, 2015). Frames in communicating texts, for example in newspaper articles, constitute a second type of frame. These frames manifest themselves through features such as keywords, visual and stereotyped images, catchphrases, moral appeals and underlying lines of reasoning (Chong & Druckman 2007; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). These will be referred to as media frames.

Brüggemann (2014) used the concepts of frame sending and frame setting to conceptualise the influence of journalist frames in the frame building process. In the case of frame sending, journalists passively transmit frames provided by other actors, for example their sources. Their own cognitive frames have no influence on what they write. In the case of frame setting, the framing of an article is highly influenced by their own interpretation of the issue. An indicator of frame setting is ‘whether the frames favoured by the journalist also prominently appear in the coverage’ (Brüggemann, 2014, p. 75). In line with Brüggemann’s thesis, this paper suggests that ‘journalistic framing practices are situated on a continuum between frame setting and frame sending’ (p. 61). That means that the frame building process is influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by factors other than their cognitive frames.

5.3 Influences on the research and writing process

Various studies have tried to structure the multitude of potential influences on media content (e.g., Brüggemann, 2014; Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2014). These models are generally made up of different layers or circles that distinguish between individual, organisational and societal domains. Our study uses the hierarchy-of-influences model of Shoemaker & Reese (1996, 2014), which describes various levels of influence on media content based on concentric circles. The individual journalist is located at the centre and represents influences such as gender, age, individual knowledge and personal attitudes and values. Journalist frames thus belong to this level. The next level is that of the media routines, which encompass factors that influence the daily work process. These include, for example, the news value of the topic, sources, directions of senior staff, expectations of audiences and constraints in terms of time and money. The following level of the media organisations is concerned with the larger organisational context, such as its economic policy, ownership and organisational structure. The final levels represent influences at the societal level, external to organisations and the journalist, such as media laws, government control and competition, and, finally, ideological forces and the mainstream status quo in the society at large.
The objective here is not to capture all influences on every possible level. Instead, the study is mostly interested in the levels of the individual journalist and routine practices. This is related to the fact that our research investigates the frame building of specific newspaper articles. We expect that it is difficult to measure influences of organisational, societal and ideological levels, such as the ownership of the media organisation or the dominant ideology in society, on the frame building of individual stories. Effects thereof are rather implicit and more suitable for philosophical and theoretical inquiry than empirical research (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Instead, we focus on influences that are felt immediately during the newsgathering and production process.

On the level of the individual journalist, this study is confined to the journalist's cognitive frames regarding poverty in developing countries. On the level of media routines, we identified six influences, based on previous research and exploratory interviews with journalists, that potentially affect the frame building of stories about our topic: news values, colleagues, sources, profile of the medium, expectations from readers, and time and budget constraints.

First, news values or newsworthiness (Strömbäck, Karlsson, & Hopmann, 2012) are expected to have an impact on the framing of a story. News values are attributes that journalists assign to issues or events. They help explain why topics become news. Brooks, Kennedy, Moon and Ranly (2007) have identified six basic values that are important drivers of journalistic story selection: timeliness, conflict, proximity, human interest, prominence and impact.

Regarding the topic at hand, we expect some of these values to be more important than others. Given the geographical distance of developing countries, there is generally no proximity and impact on the lives of the audience, unless there is a direct connection with Dutch interests. Likewise, the perceived prominence of people and institutions in developing countries may generally be less than those in the West. On the other hand, we expect conflict and human interest to be relatively important news values. Conflict may refer to wars and (ethnic) clashes, but also to tensions between powerful elites and ordinary people. Human interest is about stories that stir emotions. These could be tragic examples of refugees and victims of famines, but also hopeful stories about people who have escaped poverty.

Second, colleagues in the newsroom may influence framing. Newspapers and magazines routinely hold meetings during which topics are presented and approaches discussed (Boesman & Van Gorp, 2016). Moreover, individual journalists receive guidance from senior staff members to such an extent that their stories may be reframed in the final editing process (Tandoc, 2015).

Third, the choice of frames is likely to be affected by sources, both spoken sources such as government officials and written sources such as press releases. Sources may add perspectives and introduce their frames to the story. Journalists may adopt the frames of sources, regardless of whether the frame corresponds to their preferences (e.g., Boesman, Berbers, d’Haenens, & Van Gorp, 2015; Hänggli, 2012; Kothari, 2011). Fourth and fifth, the profile of the medium and expectations from readers may be felt during the production of news stories. Journalists want their work to be read. Hence, it can be expected that they frame their stories in such a way that their audiences are engaged (Dekavalla, 2016).

Finally, we identified time and budget constraints as factors influencing the frame building process (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Journalists typically operate under tight time schedules. Moreover, reportage trips to developing countries are expensive. Consequently, journalists may have to limit their research or opt for easily workable approaches, which in turn may influence the framing of their story. We formulated the following research questions:

RQ1 What are the cognitive frames of journalists from the Netherlands who write about global poverty?

RQ2 To what extent do journalist frames predict the media frames embedded in their articles about poverty in developing countries?

RQ3 According to journalists, which influences at the level of routine practices are important to the framing of their articles?

5.4 Poverty frames in the Dutch print media

The current study uses six frames that have been described in previous research on the framing of global poverty in the news (Vossen & Van Gorp, 2017, Vossen et al., 2016). The frames were identified by means of a qualitative, inductive frame analysis that was based on a wide variety of communications about the topic. A tight procedure was followed to avoid the detection of mere ‘researcher frames’. This procedure was based on Entman’s (1993) and Gamson and Modigliani’s (1989) definitions of frames and framing elements. In a subsequent study, the presence of the frames was measured in a content
analysis of news articles and NGO-(Non-Governmental Organisation) communications. The frames are perceived as commonly recognisable cultural themes, such as 'the victim,' 'the global village' and 'social justice.' Each of them is composed of a distinctive problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and remedy (Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007). Below follows a brief description of the frames (for an extensive description, see Vossen & Van Gorp, 2017).

1. **The Victim Frame.** At the heart of this frame is the suffering and destitution of people in poverty. They have fallen prey to tragic circumstances through no fault of their own. The frame emphasises how lack of food, shelter, medical care and other basic needs contribute to miserable living conditions. The victim frame stirs empathy and pity and taps into the moral obligation of the rich to help the poor.

2. **The Progress Frame.** This frame asserts that poverty is an issue of lagging or inadequate development. Poor countries are at an earlier and less-matured stage of development and need to catch up. They are characterised by inadequate incomes, health care, education, food supply and infrastructure. Hence, the solution lies in economic development and improvements in areas such as education and agriculture.

3. **The Social Justice frame.** This frame defines poverty as injustice and inequality: people lack opportunities and freedoms to shape their lives and to provide for their own livelihoods. The moral principle underlying this frame is the inherent dignity and rights of every human being. Hence, it asserts that commitment to people in developing countries should be based on connectedness and mutual solidarity.

4. **The Bad Governance frame.** This frame associates poverty with failing governance in developing countries. Leaders and elites are incompetent, corrupt, patronising and irresponsible. The ‘bad leader’ can also take the shape of elites, rebel leaders and warring militias. The frame may inter alia be used to highlight the adverse effects of development aid, with words such as ‘greedy dictators’ and ‘elites enriching themselves’.

5. **The Global Village frame.** The label of the fifth frame emphasises the growing interconnectedness of a globalising world. The central theme in the global village frame is that we all have a joint responsibility for the sustainable future of the planet. Cross-border issues, such as climate change and international crime, which mainly affect the poorest countries, increasingly determine this future.

6. **The Blame Us frame.** The last frame points at the guilty role played by the West. The frame is based on the notion that the rich world harms the poor world. Rich countries or elites have expanded their wealth at the expense of the poor. In the past, rich countries damaged poor countries though colonisation and the exploitation of natural resources. Nowadays, they hurt the poor through unfair global economic systems and bad behaviour of big companies. Hence, solving global poverty starts in the rich world.

A recent frame analysis of news articles in the Dutch press revealed that the progress frame was the most commonly used frame (Vossen et al., 2016). The analysis was based on 289 articles on global poverty that had been published in three national and four local newspapers between 2011 and 2013. The progress frame appeared in 49 per cent of the articles. The victim frame and bad governance frame were used in 26 per cent and 23 per cent of the stories respectively. The three remaining frames, social justice (14%), global village (13%) and blame us (13%), were used less frequently.

### 5.5 Method

This study consisted of a quantitative survey among 54 journalists and a frame analysis of 435 news articles that were written by the respondents of the survey. In addition, we conducted semi-structured interviews with seven journalists.

Investigating the framing of global poverty is not straightforward. Global poverty is not a typical beat topic, like ‘climate change’ or the ‘European Union.’ Rather, it is a theme that comes along in different stories, for example in relation to political conflicts, climate change and economic growth (Vossen et al., 2016). Consequently, there are no typical ‘global poverty journalists.’ A wide range of professionals, such as foreign correspondents, foreign editors and freelance journalists, cover the topic. Therefore, the identification of the journalists started with news articles on the topic and was based on the names that could be retrieved.

#### 5.5.1 Author search

We collected articles on global poverty in the Dutch print media over a period of two years (between 15 August 2014 and 15 August 2016). The search was done through LexisNexis. The objective was to find articles that
paid attention to the conditions of people in developing countries. The search
was based on search strings that included words like ‘poverty’, ‘development’,
‘hunger’, ‘aid’ and index terms like ‘Africa’ and ‘South-East Asia.’ The search
terms were derived from the frame descriptions and were used in a previous
quantitative frame analysis (Vossen et al., 2016). The search generated 3,403
articles. After the removal of irrelevant hits and short articles (fewer than 150
words), 1,513 articles remained. Based thereon, a database was constructed
with names of journalists who had written at least three articles on the topic
over the past two years. The list contained 94 names. We noted the type of
medium and job description of the authors, for example ‘foreign correspon-
dent’ or ‘economic reporter’.

5.5.2 Semi-structured interviews
We conducted semi-structured interviews with seven journalists with
different job descriptions, from different media. Four interviews took place
in June and July 2016 and they dealt with the production of the journalist’s
latest article on this topic. The journalists were questioned about issues that
had influenced the framing of their article, such as sources, time constraints
and pressure from the editors. Also, the journalists’ personal frame prefere-
cnces were discussed. The purpose of these interviews was twofold. First,
they contributed to the identification of the influences on the level of media
routines and to the preparation of the subsequent questionnaire. Second, after
analysing the survey results, remarks from these journalists were used to bet-
ter understand the outcomes.

Another three interviews took place in November and December 2016,
after the analysis of the survey results was completed. The journalists were as-
ked to reflect on the preliminary findings of the survey and to relate them to
their personal work experience. As with the other interviews, their comments
contributed to the interpretation of the survey results.

5.5.3 Survey
We invited the journalists to participate in a web-based survey. How-
ever, we only included journalists that had written about the issue during the
previous year. The reason for this limitation was that we wanted them to
recall the production of the latest issue-related article. We assumed that this
would be difficult if it a long time had passed since the production. Therefore,
12 journalists were excluded. Another four journalists had retired or changed
jobs. The remaining 78 journalists received an e-mail invitation to participate
in an online survey. Prior to this, we sent a personal e-mail with a notifica-
tion, in which we referred to their latest article on the topic, in order to make
it easier for them to recollect during the survey.

The survey contained three open questions in which the participants were
asked to reflect freely on the causes and consequences of poverty in devel-
oping countries and potential remedies to alleviate it. We included a ques-
tion to assess their general knowledge of the global poverty trend. Next, we
presented a brief description of the six global poverty frames and asked them
to what extent they personally identified with each of these frames. Answers
were noted on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘fully matches my perso-
nal view’ to ‘does not match my personal view at all’. The subsequent questi-
on were concerned with the latest issue-related article they had written. We
asked the participants to what extent each of the frames was expressed in the
article. Next, we asked to what extent, according to their own perceptions,
the chosen perspective had been influenced by routine practices: news value,
colleagues, time and resources, profile of their medium, expectations from
readers and sources. Further, we questioned their perceived level of autonomy
when working on articles on this subject. Finally, the journalists were given
the opportunity to freely voice further comments.

Three journalists and two researchers tested the questionnaire, after which
some questions were clarified. The final questionnaire was online between 27
September and 18 October 2016. Two reminders were sent to non-respon-
dents. Eventually, 54 respondents completed the questionnaire, a response
rate of 69 per cent. Respondents were compared with the non-respondents.
The groups differed slightly: on average, the participants had written more
articles (9.9 versus 8.1), were more likely to be female (37% versus 33%) and
were more likely to be a foreign correspondent (39% versus 33%). Moreover,
journalists from daily newspapers, especially de Volkskrant, were somewhat
overrepresented in our sample (69% versus 58%), whereas journalists from
regional newspapers were underrepresented (9% versus 28%).

5.5.4 Frame analysis
The articles of the survey-participants (n=435) were subjected to a frame
analysis. One researcher did the coding. The coder used a codebook with
the same descriptions of the six frames, plus a list of interpretative questi-
on of frame analysis. One researcher did the coding. The coder used a codebook with
the same descriptions of the six frames, plus a list of interpretative questions to recognise them in a text. For example, the question "Does the article give examples of progress or decline in developing countries?" was used as an identifier for the progress frame. The question "Does the message contain
descriptions of poor living conditions and hardships of people in developing countries’ served as an identifier for the victim frame. The coder noted whether each of the six frames was ‘present’ or ‘absent’ in the text (Matthes & Kohring, 2008).

5.5.5 Analysing procedures

The Likert scale used to measure journalist frames was different from the binary scale for the measurement of media frames. To compare the two, we transformed the codes for the journalist frames to a binary scale. For each frame, the scores ‘fully matches my personal view’ and ‘somewhat matches my personal view’ were combined to create a score of ‘1’, which indicated that this frame was ‘present’ as a journalist frame. The scores ‘neutral’, ‘not really’ and ‘not at all matches my personal view’ were combined to create the score of ‘0’, which indicated that the frame was ‘absent’.

We first compared the journalist frames and media frames on an aggregate level. For that purpose, we put the media frames in rank order and numbered them from 1 (most frequent frame) to 6 (least frequent frame). We did the same for the journalist frames, numbering them from 1 (frame with highest ‘fully’ to ‘somewhat’ agreement score) to 6 (frame with the lowest ‘fully’ to ‘somewhat’ agreement score). We calculated the Spearman rank correlation between the two lists.

The next step was to compare the journalist frames and the media frames on the level of the individual journalist. Chi-square tests of independence were calculated comparing the frequency of journalist frames and media frames. Hence, it was tested whether the presence of a journalist frame predicted if the journalist used the frame more often or less often than theoretically expected. For example, if journalists indicated that the victim frame ‘matched’ with their personal views, we tested whether they used the victim frame more frequently or less frequently than could be expected based on the frequency distribution of the frames. We also tested whether a victim frame preference predicted the use of the five other frames. Then we repeated this procedure for each of the frames. We reported the p-values to indicate whether the connections between journalist and media frame were statistically significant.

5.5.6 Limitations

During the investigation, we encountered some obstacles and limitations. First, several journalists commented that it was difficult for them to grasp the notion of ‘global poverty’. They commented, for example, that poverty was a vague concept, that the poverty situations in different countries cannot be compared, or that they could only make statements about the specific country or region about which they wrote.

Second, despite achieving a high response rate, the sample size was rather small, simply because the population of Dutch journalists who write about this topic is limited. Consequently, it was not possible to make a reliable comparison between frame perceptions and individual attributes such as age or gender, or between frame preferences and job titles or media outlet. Moreover, the study was confined to print media. However, during the research, some of the journalists we spoke to also worked for other media types, such as television. They emphasised that the influence of fellow editors was larger and the opportunity for personal input smaller. We therefore assume that our results are not generalisable to other media channels. Likewise, the results are probably not generalisable to other countries, which may have different journalistic cultures and media routines.

5.6 Results

5.6.1 Who writes about poverty in developing countries?

Before answering the research questions, we set out with a general description of the group of journalists we studied (see Figure 5.1). The figures in this paragraph are based on the dataset of 94 journalists that we initially identified. They give a more complete picture of the group than the 54 participants in the survey. The data revealed that most of the journalists are male (67%) and had on average written 8.4 articles about the issue between 15 August 2014 and 15 August 2016. One-third of them held a post as a foreign-based correspondent (33%). About a fifth (22%) held a position as foreign editor, others were freelancer (15%), economics or politics editors (13%) or had another job description (17%), such as editor-in-chief or general reporter. From the participants in our survey (n=54) we learned that their average age was 48 years and their average work experience in the field was 22 years.

The 94 journalists accounted for half the stories (51%) in our dataset (n=1,513). The other half of the stories was written by authors who had produced fewer than three articles over the past two years (26%), by opinion authors (4%), or by authors who could not be identified because the article did not have a by-line (19%). It is possible that some of those articles were in
The data reinforced the notion that ‘poverty in developing countries’ was not a beat topic. Many journalists with different functions covered it and most of them only wrote about the subject occasionally. The median number of articles that we retrieved from the 94 journalists was six, which means that half of them wrote, on average, no more than one article in four months on the topic. We identified only four journalists that had written 24 or more articles on this topic, which equates to at least one article a month.

The above is also in line with our observation that ‘poverty in developing countries’ is rarely a main topic in news stories. Two respondents expressed this eloquently in their comments: ‘Poverty never plays a leading role in my stories; it comes along as a décor piece’ (foreign correspondent, female); and, ‘Poverty is a factor which plays a role in my stories like the weather does’ (foreign correspondent, male). Nevertheless, our journalists were more knowledgeable about the general poverty trend than the general Dutch audience: 72 per cent know that extreme poverty in developing countries had decreased over the past decades. By contrast, only 18 per cent of the public in the Netherlands thinks this is the case (Motivaction, 2016).

5.6.2 The cognitive frames of the journalists

The participants were given a brief description of the previously described six global poverty frames and asked to what extent each of them matched with their personal vision. The results are displayed in Figure 5.2. Journalists felt most strongly related to the bad governance frame and they did so virtually unanimously: 53 of the 54 journalists (98%) related ‘somewhat’ to ‘strongly’ to this perspective. There was also broad acclaim for the social justice, the progress and global village perspectives, in which respectively 85 per cent, 81 per cent and 80 per cent of the respondents recognised their personal view.

Journalists felt least related to the victim perspective (43%); only one respondent said it ‘strongly’ matched with his personal belief. Agreement with the ‘blame us’ perspective was in between: it was supported by 57 per cent of the respondents, of which the clear majority felt ‘somewhat’ connected.

This outcome was deepened in the open questions in which journalists revealed their ideas about the characteristics of poverty, its causes and ways to reduce it. By and large, the journalists’ identification with the six global
poverty frames matched with their spontaneous comments. This is visualised in Table 5.1. The left column displays the percentage of journalists that spontaneously referred to a frame in their open answers. The right column shows the percentage that said the frame matched ‘somewhat’ or ‘strongly’ with their personal perspective. The frames that journalists – in aggregate – most often referred to spontaneously, were also the frames that best fit their personal perspective.

Table 5.1. References to the frames in open answers and agreement with the frame descriptions (n=54).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Percentage of journalists which referred to frame in open answers</th>
<th>Percentage of journalists which agreed with frame description*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad Governance</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Village</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame Us</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * ‘The frame ‘somewhat’ or ‘strongly’ matched their personal view.

For example, journalists frequently explained the causes of poverty in terms of failing government and unequal power relations (e.g., ‘corruption’, ‘indifference of the ruling class’, ‘governments that look at their own wealth and power instead of the welfare of their country’). Moreover, when asked to reflect on remedies to alleviate poverty, they often focused on improving governance in developing countries (e.g., ‘real change must come from the population of the countries themselves, for example by combating corruption’).

Likewise, comments that pointed to injustice were made when thinking about the causes of poverty (‘unequal power relations,’ ‘exploitation,’ ‘unfair trade systems’) as well as the remedies for ending it (‘fair trade agreements,’ ‘a fair economic system,’ ‘stop tax evasion’). References to progress, or the lack thereof, mainly appeared in the suggested remedies and specifically pointed to improvements in economic and social areas. In particular, ‘education’ and ‘economic growth’ were mentioned.

In line with the findings shown in Figure 5.2, the victim frame was not frequently mentioned in the open comments. References mainly appeared when journalists wrote down their first spontaneous associations with the words ‘poverty in developing countries’ (‘misery’, ‘human suffering’, ‘distressing’). However, references to the frame barely came forward when discussing causes and solutions.

At one point, the open answers deviated from the identification with the frame-descriptions. This concerns the global village frame. Central to this perspective is the relationship between poverty, cross-border problems and the joint responsibility of the rich and poor to solve them. Only 17 per cent of the respondents referred to this spontaneously. Nevertheless, when faced with this statement in the list of frames, 80 per cent said it matched their personal view.

5.6.3 The relation between journalist frames and media frames

Figure 5.3 displays the frequency of poverty frames in the articles that were written by the journalists in our sample. The progress frame was the most widely used frame. It was observed in 57 per cent of the articles. The least-used frames were global village and blame us (14%).

The journalist frames were only weakly related to the media frames. We tested this relationship in two ways. First, we compared their rank orders on an aggregate level. We found no significant correlation (r = 0.31, p = 0.54). Second, we investigated whether the journalist’s preference for a frame had a predictive value for the use of this frame or other frames in their articles. The p-values are shown in Table 5.2.

A preference for the victim frame had the strongest predictive value: journalists with this preference were more likely to use the victim and global village frame in their articles, and less likely to use the progress frame. The predictive value of the other frame preferences was rather low: none of the other journalist frames predicted which frames they would use more often in their articles. In six cases, the journalist frame predicted a less frequent use of a media frame: journalists with a preference for the social justice, global village or bad governance frame used the progress frame less frequently in their articles; journalists with a preference for the bad governance or blame us frame used the victim frame less often. In 27 of the 36 comparisons, no statistically significant association was found.
5.6.4 Perceived influences at the level of media routines

Next, we turned to the influences at the level of media routines that impacted the framing of their stories. According to the perceptions of the journalists in our sample, the news value and sources had the biggest influence on the perspective they had chosen for their last article on the issue (see Figure 5.4). Respectively, 85 and 82 per cent of them regarded the impact of these factors as 'very big' or 'big'. The perceived influence of the profile of the medium (45%) and the available time and budget (38%) slightly skewed the results to being somewhat more important than less important for the chosen angle. Least felt were the expectations of readers, and at the bottom of the list, colleagues. Almost 60 per cent of the journalists said the impact of colleagues on their chosen perspective for the article was fairly small or very small, and none of them thought their impact was very big. The limited influence of colleagues was reflected in the journalists’ perception of autonomy: participants stated almost unanimously that their autonomy was very big (49%) or fairly big (47%) when writing articles on this topic.

These findings were further elucidated in open comments and semi-structured interviews. We specifically looked at comments about news value, sources and colleagues. Several journalists explained how their chosen approach was almost automatically embedded in the news value they had attributed to the topic. For example, one journalist recalled how a bad governance perspective had entered a story about South Sudan. Following news feeds about renewed fighting, he decided to write a story that pointed at the root cause of the...
issue, notably the greed for power of the leaders (foreign correspondent, male).

In general, the choice of global poverty frames did not seem to be the result of a conscious process. This was aptly expressed in the following comment: ‘It is not that I think: ‘which angle concerning poverty shall I chose now?’’ (foreign correspondent, female). When asked about the choice of story angles, another journalist remarked: ‘I’m not exactly sure how that works in my mind’ (foreign editor, female). However, a few journalists explained that they had considered alternatives, especially when dealing with ongoing issues such as climate change or protracted conflicts. For instance, a male foreign editor remarked that the conflict between the failing leaders in South Sudan had already gotten much attention in his newspaper. Hence, he decided it was now time for a story that highlighted the fate of the victims.

Although journalists generally started their investigations with an approach for their story, many stressed that they were open for new perspectives during the research and writing process. In particular, these were perspectives that were forwarded by sources, for example research reports from the World Bank or International Monetary Fund. In addition, some recalled how Google searches had yielded background information that had drawn their attention to storylines they had not thought of before. However, journalists specifically referred to the importance of spoken sources, as was expressed in the following comment: ‘The way poverty passes by depends on what is happening locally and what people tell about it’ (foreign correspondent, female). Others gave examples of how information from people they talked to had influenced the framing of their article: ‘I had no intention to include the issues people had with the local government in my story. However, it was so dominant in the interviews that I couldn’t ignore that storyline’ (foreign correspondent, female). Others gave examples of how information from people they talked to had influenced the framing of their article: ‘I had no intention to include the issues people had with the local government in my story. However, it was so dominant in the interviews that I couldn’t ignore that storyline’ (foreign correspondent, female). Others gave examples of how information from people they talked to had influenced the framing of their article: ‘I had no intention to include the issues people had with the local government in my story. However, it was so dominant in the interviews that I couldn’t ignore that storyline’ (foreign correspondent, female).

By contrast, colleagues were regarded of little importance for the chosen frames. Naturally, ideas for stories were discussed with colleagues, such as the chief editor for international news of the newspapers. However, the journalists themselves had a big say in this process. One female foreign editor explained: ‘At the morning meetings there is a list of topics that my chief has drawn up, but I always present my own ideas and explain what I want to do. Of course, colleagues can criticise them and not every idea is accepted, but there is no one who says: ‘Now we have agreed that this is the story that you have to write.’ I don’t get orders’.

The high perception of autonomy and independence and the limited influence of peers were further reflected in various comments, such as: ‘My colleagues thought it was an interesting topic. They had no further suggestions’ (chief editor, female); and: ‘When I grab the phone to talk with a colleague, I have a 60 to 70 per cent chance that he will accept my idea. That colleague knows that I have thought carefully about the topics that I present to him’ (foreign correspondent, male). Also in the final editing phase the influence of colleagues was perceived as being limited. Substantive changes were generally made in consultation with the journalists: ‘Nothing happens without my consent’ (foreign editor, male).

At one point, however, the findings seemed to show a contradiction. About three-quarters of them felt that their personal knowledge and views somewhat (60%) or strongly (17%) contributed to the framing of their articles. That seemed inconsistent with the fact that personal frame preferences were not really visible in the stories. When probed, journalists explained that the influence of their personal knowledge and vision was rather indirect: it was noticeable in their selection of topics and the choice of sources they consulted. As one of them explained: ‘Your personal vision determines which topics you put on the agenda. And the selection of the persons you speak to has everything to do with your vision. You can choose to let certain organisations tell the whole story, or you can choose to present various views’ (foreign editor, male).

5.7 Conclusion and discussion

This paper investigates the relation between journalist frames and media frames concerning poverty in developing countries in the Dutch print media. The findings suggest that journalists who regularly write about this topic consider themselves as being highly autonomous professionals who work with little interference from colleagues. They view the poverty issue especially from the perspective of poor governance, injustice and (lack of) progress. However, the frames they favour have little predictive value for the frames they apply in their articles; both on an aggregate and individual level, journalist frames do not correspond well with media frames. According to the journalists, the framing of their stories is specifically influenced by the news value that they attribute to the issue, and the information they retrieve from sources. In conclusion, the shape and approach of the stories are especially determined by situational factors, such as the events that are taking place, their location, and the people that are involved.
The perceived importance of news values and sources on the frame building process supports previous research (Harcup & O’Neil, 2001, 2016; Ström bäck, Karlsson & Hopmann, 2012). Our impression is that the journalists generally felt that news values directed them to certain frames, and that they did not consciously step back and consider alternatives. For some, it even seemed difficult to distinguish between news values and frames. One commented, for instance, that when the issue was about injustice, then that was the poverty-perspective in the story. However, from a news-framing viewpoint, news values and news frames are not the same. For example, when covering the bad working conditions in Asian clothing factories, the journalist could choose to frame it as a ‘social justice’ story. That way, the story would emphasise the violation of the workers’ rights. However, he could also choose to frame it as a ‘victim’ story, by particularly highlighting the misery of the people involved.

Furthermore, the importance of sources confirms the tendency of journalists to adopt the frames of people they consult (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Within journalism studies, there is a critical discourse about the influence of official sources and elite sources and its impact on the independence of journalism (e.g., Franklin & Carlson, 2011). However, with respect to the topic at hand, journalists specifically mentioned the local people they had met while investigating their story. Many stressed the importance of having an open ear for what local people told them, thereby emphasising the value of including the view of the disadvantaged or the poor. Hence, they underscore the importance of involving non-elite sources in their stories.

A somewhat surprising finding is the limited perceived influence of colleagues. This contrasts with studies that emphasise the role of work floor meetings on the framing process (e.g., Boesman & Van Gorp, 2016). One explanation is that the stories about developing countries are often made far away from the newsroom, for example by freelancers and foreign correspondents. Those journalists usually consult only one editor and are not part of routine discussions with colleagues. Another explanation is that journalists who regularly write about the topic have a knowledge advantage. This might give them bargaining power when discussing ideas with colleagues. Finally, there may be a discrepancy between journalist’s perceived influence of colleagues, as studied in this article, and the observed influence of colleagues, as seen in ethnographic newsroom studies (e.g., Boesman & Van Gorp, 2016).

This research is the first to compare journalist frames and media frames on an individual level. We believe that it is a valuable extension of the literature in two ways. First, it contributes to the literature about frame setting and frame sending. Our results identify journalists as being more on the frame sending side; in general, they would rather pass on interpretations provided by other actors than advance their individual interpretations (Brüggemann, 2014, p. 62). This is illustrated, for example, by the discrepancy between the victim frame in the minds of journalists and in the articles. On the aggregate level, the frame was at the bottom of the list of personal frame preferences. However, it was the third most used frame in the articles. One explanation here is that news values, such as conflict and human interest, encourage journalists to use the frame, even though they have little affinity for it. This seems to confirm Brüggemann’s working hypothesis that ‘journalists promote those frames that fit well with the professional criteria for journalistic selection and interpretation such as news factors like proximity or negativity’ (p. 77).

In addition, our study is of interest for the literature on the gap between journalistic role perceptions and role enactment. Studies on role performance have pointed at a discrepancy between what journalists regard as ‘ideal roles’ for journalism practice, and the enactment of these roles in their daily work (e.g., Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014). In other words, what journalists regard as important should not be taken as a proxy for what they produce. This study also points at a discrepancy between what is in the journalist’s mind and what is on paper. An important difference, however, should be noted: when studying journalistic role preferences, journalists reflect on what they regard as ‘ideal roles’ for journalistic practice. By contrast, when asking about frame preferences, journalists do not necessarily reflect on what they regard as the ‘ideal framing’ of their articles. Hence, the gap between frame preference and frame enactment does not necessarily point at a friction between ideas and practice.

Beyond scientific relevance, we believe that our findings are of interest for the wider debate about media representations of global poverty. This applies specifically to criticisms of the media’s focus on ongoing problems and misery in developing countries and its lack of attention to wider historical and global contexts (Bond, 2014; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009; Vossen et al., 2016). Our findings suggest that answers to questions about the origins of such representations must be sought in media routines, notably news value and sources, rather than the personal preferences of the journalists who write about it.

This leads to an important point of discussion that goes beyond the actual content of the articles. It can be questioned whether it is desirable for jour-
nalists’ frames to have little influence on news articles about global poverty, and subsequently, whether it is desirable that specific news values and sources determine the framing of such articles.

At first sight, the answer is positive. Media articles should reflect newsworthy events and give the floor to sources that express different points of view, rather than forwarding the personal views of journalists. This is consistent with the journalistic norm of remaining neutral and objective when covering issues and events.

However, this simultaneously raises questions about the media’s role in informing the public about this issue. Studies suggest that audience perceptions of misery, dependency and lack of progress in developing countries are related to representations in the media (Bond, 2014; Van Heerde & Hudson, 2009). A recent study of articles on global poverty in the Dutch press showed that these are three times more likely to highlight problems than positive developments (Vossen, 2015). Most likely, this has to do with the importance that journalists give to news values like conflict and human drama.

This brings us to a paradox. Individual stories on global poverty conform to the journalistic norm to neutrally report newsworthy events. However, their aggregate contributes to an overall picture of the situation in developing countries that journalists, who are much more knowledgeable in this matter than the public, might not recognise themselves. Interesting in this context is the fact that 72 per cent of the journalists know that extreme poverty is declining, while only 18 per cent of the Dutch public thinks this is the case.

This observation does not necessarily imply that journalists should give priority to their personal frame preferences in their articles. But it does suggest that they should be aware, beyond the level of individual stories, of the themes they put on the agenda, the news values they assign to them, the sources they select and consequently the wider picture of the situation in developing countries that they present. After all, regarding the representation of global poverty to the public, they are the ones in the driver’s seat.

Conclusions and Discussion
6 Conclusions and Discussion

A fundraising commercial of Concern Worldwide in 2012 shows a close up of a little African boy. His eyes are closed, he is gasping and his ribs protrude from his thin body. A sad sounding British voice tells us that he ‘won’t last much longer without your help’ and asks the viewer to donate ‘just three pounds a month’. Another fundraising commercial, by Oxfam UK in 2013, features a smiling Indian woman who walks home with a newly received cow. We see how she milks the animal, sells the surplus and sends her son to school – all this accompanied by a cheerful tune and a voice-over that asks the viewer to ‘help lift her life’ with just a small donation.

These are examples of the diversity of the (visual) language with which developing countries are represented in the European media. Viewers of the first movie see destitute people who cannot subsist without outside help. Viewers of the second film see active people who can climb out of poverty with a little push. The current study aimed to understand to what extent various ‘stories’ about poverty in developing countries are told in Europe, where they come from, and how they impact perceptions of the audience. This final chapter starts with a brief overview of the motivation for this research and continues with the most important findings. It ends with a discussion of the outcomes in light of the debate about developing countries’ imagery, and makes recommendations for NGOs and news media.

6.1 Investigating global poverty framing

Public engagement with poverty in developing countries (hereafter, global poverty) is under pressure in Europe. Although most Europeans think it is important to help people in developing countries, the levels of concern are dropping. Moreover, many people have the feeling that little progress has been made in the fight against global poverty and they question the significance of international cooperation (Bond, 2014; Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Glennie, Straw, & Wild, 2012; Shoemaker & Papadongonas, 2016). Against this background, this thesis questions the representation of poverty in developing countries in the European media. Most people identify the media, especially television and print media, as their primary source of information about developing countries. More specifically, they point to the news and NGOs as important transmitters of this information (Bond, 2014; European Commission, 2015; Glennie et al., 2012; Pollet, 2012b). Hence, this thesis is interested in the contribution of news media and NGOs to perceptions of poverty and development.

It is not the first study on this topic; much has been written on media representations of poverty in developing countries. The tone of these studies has generally been critical. A recurring debate concerns the use of ‘victim images’ for fundraising purposes, for example, of African children as in the aforementioned Concern video. Action groups and scientists criticise the use of such images because it is allegedly stigmatising and stereotyping, and eventually contributes to relief fatigue (Darnton & Kirk, 2011; Lijfering, 2014; Manzo, 2008). Likewise, the news media are being criticised for their one-sided emphasis on misery, conflicts and burdensome conditions of the poor in developing countries, notably in Africa. These critiques cannot be separated from the historical relationship between the West and the developing world. It is argued that the ‘colonial discourse’, in which people in developing countries are portrayed as backward, primitive and violent, still leaves a mark on current media representations and public perceptions of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Dogra, 2012; Manzo, 2008).

These discussions suggest that Western media mostly distribute stereotyped images of people in developing countries, where they are portrayed as tragic, aid-dependent and primitive victims. But in fact, the basis for the evidence of these claims is very thin. Empirical studies of media representations of people in developing countries are scarce. Moreover, these studies are often limited to British data, or to specific topics, such as the reporting of famines.
The goal of this research was to increase knowledge about the representation of poverty in developing countries in the European media. It aimed to map the diversity of poverty representations and to measure the frequencies of different representations in media content. In addition, it aimed to enhance understanding of the relationship between media portrayals and public perceptions, and perceptions of journalists who create the news about poverty in developing countries. The central research question was:

**RQ** What stories about global poverty are narrated in Europe?

The study took place in three countries: The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium. Belgian data were limited to Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part. The choice of three countries made it possible to compare data and determine to what extent they were country specific. The research encompassed both news media and campaigns of NGOs, since the public identifies both as major senders of information on developing countries. Concerning the news media, the study was limited to an investigation of newspaper articles. At the time of data collection (2013), the public perceived newspapers as the second most important source of knowledge on developing countries to television (European Commission, 2011). News articles were searched by topic via online databases and investigated on an a-select sample basis. The investigation of NGO-communications was focused on messages that draw a wide audience, such as campaign commercials on television and advertisements in newspapers. Expressions on websites and in newsletters were not included because it was assumed that they mainly reach a small portion of an already engaged audience.

**Methodological approach**

The main research method was a frame analysis. Frames can be conceived as small, implicit theories about what is happening and what is important. They are meta-communicative messages that give meaning to an issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2005). Moreover, frames are part of a shared culture. They are not purely individual, but they occur in a broader social context and belong to the collective memory of a large group of people. Both senders and receivers of frames draw from the same pool of cultural frames when they create a message or interpret its meaning (D’Angelo, 2002; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Van Gorp, 2007). Important for this investigation are the four different functions of a frame; each frame defines a problem, says something about causes and consequences, promotes a solution and contains a moral message (Entman, 1993). These elements do not all have to be present in a message. If, for example, we are confronted with images of hungry and suffering people (i.e., the victim frame), it may automatically stir our awareness that they need our help.

Framing was an appropriate concept for this study for various reasons. First, it makes it possible to study media representations on a meta-level, thereby classifying and measuring different representations in a systematic way. In addition, framing happens in various phases of the communication process. Hence, a frame analysis can be used to study representations in texts, but also to study the news production process and the effects of media frames on the public. That makes it a suitable concept to study connections between media content on the one hand, and, on the other hand, audience and journalists’ perceptions.

Based on this methodological approach, the study addressed the representation of global poverty throughout the communication process. To begin, the study mapped the diversity of poverty perspectives (Chapter 2). Subsequently, it measured their presence in current news articles and NGO-ads in the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders (Chapter 3). The objective was to investigate to what extent these media frames were country specific, and to what extent they contributed to problematising representations of people in poverty. The study then addressed the impact of media frames on public perceptions; it investigated to what extent the overarching media narrative on global poverty in the UK was related to the overarching public narrative on this issue (Chapter 4). Finally, the study moved to the frame building process in the newsroom. The objective was to increase understanding of the emergence of frames by investigating the relation between the cognitive frames of journalists and the media frames in their articles (Chapter 5).

### 6.2 Main findings

#### 6.2.1 Nine global poverty frames and their application in the debate about development cooperation

The starting point for the entire research was the mapping of the diversity of global poverty representations. This was done in Chapter 2 based on an inductive frame analysis. The analysis resulted in a matrix with nine distinctive global poverty frames (Table 2.1). They were labelled victim, progress,
social justice, bad governance, global village, blame us, every man for himself, impending doom and chain of being.

Subsequently, the chapter described the role of frames in the discussion about development cooperation. The discussion focused on two main questions. The first was, Why should we give? The second was, Is development aid effective? Seven of the nine frames played a role in one or both discussion. For example, in the first discussion the victim frame forwarded the view that the West has a moral obligation to commit itself to benefitting the poor; the needy deserve our help. In contrast, the impending doom frame stressed the importance of development cooperation for the benefit of Western countries, by stating that aid enhances our security.

The second discussion, on the effectiveness of development aid, was driven by the progress and the bad governance frames. The progress frame either emphasised that great results had been or could be achieved with efforts of NGOs and donors, or that results had been disappointing. The bad governance frame was exclusively used to highlight the negative effects of aid, for instance, by arguing that aid money is wasted and that development aid fosters corruption. A counter-narrative of ‘good governance’ was missing in the debate.

6.2.2 Measuring frames in NGO-advertisements and news articles

Having identified a variety of global poverty frames, the objective of Chapter 3 was to measure their application in media content in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Flanders. The analysis was based on samples of 286 NGO-communications and 876 news articles. Six frames played a role in these media representations: victim, progress, social justice, bad governance, blame us and global village. Their frequency was measured in a deductive frame analysis. The other three frames, every man for himself, impending doom and chain of being, were omitted after an exploratory analysis had shown that they only occurred sporadically in the dataset.

An overall finding was that no single perspective dominated the coverage of global poverty in the media. Newspapers varied several frames and none of them appeared in most of the articles. The most important frames in the news were progress, victim and bad governance. Perspectives that emphasised social justice, cross-border connectivity (global village) and the negative role of the West (blame us) were used less frequently. One difference between the countries stood out: The Dutch news media applied the progress frame more frequently, and the victim frame less frequently than those in Flanders and the UK.

NGOs used a more limited repertoire of frames. For them, the victim, social justice and progress frames were the most important. The other frames were virtually absent. There was a striking difference between the UK on the one hand and the Netherlands and Flanders on the other hand; the UK advertisements were clearly dominated by a victim frame. It was seen in British NGO-communications twice as often as in the Dutch and Flemish ones.

The frame analysis was deepened by addressing criticisms of ‘problematising’ representations of people in developing countries. For that purpose, the study specifically looked at newspaper photos and visual material of NGOs. The main finding was that the media do not overwhelm us with explicit ‘pitiful victim’ imagery of suffering and starving people. News media in the three countries, and Dutch and Flemish NGOs, used such images sparingly. However, British NGOs were an exception to this general finding, because they frequently employed pitiful images. Nevertheless, while the study put the explicit use of ‘victim portrayals’ in perspective, it confirmed the idea that (people from) developing countries are predominantly portrayed as dependent on outside help or intervention. NGO-communications especially reinforced the South’s dependency on the West, by rarely showing actions and initiatives of local people.

6.2.3 Connections between the overarching media narrative and audience narrative about poverty in developing countries

Chapters 2 and 3 specifically focused on the presence of frames in media content. The subsequent chapters considered the role of frames at different stages of the communication process. Chapter 4 investigated the link between media representations of global poverty and public opinion on this issue. The analysis was based on nine public opinion surveys. In addition, the analysis of British media content from the previous chapters was used. Besides poverty frames, the tone of voice of these media messages was examined.

Three storylines came to the surface in the analysis of media content. The first was that the media framed poverty primarily as an issue of ‘victims’, ‘lack of development’ and ‘bad governance’. Second, media reports predominantly located the causes of poverty in developing countries, but they suggested that solutions mainly had to come from the outside. Third, media coverage strongly focused on enduring problems and crises, thereby suggesting that there is little progress in developing countries.
This media narrative was compared with recurrent and dominant themes and answers in the public opinion surveys. There were strong similarities. Like the media, the public considered poverty in developing countries primarily as a local problem, characterised by miserable conditions and lack of development. Moreover, the public was convinced that poverty remained the same or had become worse in recent decades. This was consistent with the lack of attention in the media for progress in developing countries. Finally, public perceptions of corruption and dysfunctional governments in developing countries were very strong, which was also consistent with the emphasis of news media on bad governance.

The study did not answer whether media coverage causes public perceptions, or whether the media merely reflect existing public perceptions. It argued that there is an interaction between media coverage and public opinion, with media coverage as a strong driver of this interaction. Moreover, it argued that the media narrative of bad governance and enduring misery and dependence is problematic, because it reinforces the public narrative of developing regions as dependent, backward and stagnant. Furthermore, the media narrative reinforces the notion that there is no progress in developing countries, which may weaken people’s long-term engagement and support for international development cooperation.

6.2.4 Links between journalists’ cognitive frames and the media frames in their articles

Chapter 5, the fourth and final empirical chapter, focused on the emergence of poverty frames in the newsroom. More specifically, it investigated to what extent the cognitive frames of journalists influenced the framing of the articles that they wrote. The results were based on a survey of 54 Dutch journalists that regularly write about poverty and famine in developing countries. The findings were compared with the frames in the articles they had written during the previous two years.

Journalists personally felt the most affinity with the bad governance, social justice and progress frames. They felt the least affinity with the victim frame. However, these cognitive journalist frames hardly connected with the frames in their articles. The only exceptions were journalists with a preference for a victim frame; those journalists used the victim frame slightly more often than expected in their articles. For other frames, the personal preference of journalists did not predict how they framed their stories. According to the journalists, the chosen perspective for their article was especially influenced by news values and sources.

The survey also found that journalists were more knowledgeable about the wider global poverty trend than the public; three-quarters of them knew that extreme poverty has fallen in recent decades. Among the Dutch public, this fact is known by 18 per cent (Motivaction, 2016). Hence, the findings suggested that journalists do not reflect their more elaborate knowledge of the poverty trend in their articles, and consequently do not pass it on to their audience.

6.3 General conclusion

This section returns to the main question: What stories about global poverty are narrated in Europe? The paragraph analyses how newspapers and NGOs each contribute to the media representation of poverty in developing countries. The framing functions serve as a guideline. How is the poverty issue defined? What are the main causes? What is the moral message? And who is responsible for reducing or eradicating it? Moreover, the section addresses the main difference between the countries and discusses the perpetuation of poverty frames throughout the communication process.

6.3.1 Defining the poverty issue

An important finding of the study, as stated above, was that no single perspective dominated the coverage of poverty in developing countries. However, it was noted that NGOs used a more limited repertoire of frames than newspapers. This is understandable from the fundraising objective of NGOs; some frames, such as bad governance, will not easily help them to generate donations. Consequently, their communications do not explain the full picture of poverty and its causes.

Two perspectives were important for both newspapers and NGOs. The first is the progress perspective, which defines poverty as a lack of development. Both newspapers and NGOs thereby emphasised what still needed to be done to achieve progress, and less on what had been achieved already. Second, the victim perspective was important for both newspapers and NGOs. This defines poverty as a tragedy that affects innocent people and causes human suffering. Newspapers used this perspective, for instance, in stories about disasters and famines, and NGOs, in emergency relief campaigns.

For newspapers, the narrative of bad governance was also important. This frame, which defines poverty as a matter of poor leadership and irresponsible
governance, was reflected in reports of political unrest and regional conflicts. Development organisations, by contrast, rarely used this frame. Instead, they attached importance to the perspective of social justice, which defines poverty as the outcome of injustice and inequality. The frame appeared, for example, in campaign messages for the rights of children or people with disabilities. Newspapers, in turn, used this perspective infrequently.

The remaining perspectives received less attention in the media. Little attention was given to perspectives that emphasise the interaction between the West and the South. Such is the impending doom frame, which regards global poverty as a threat to the security, stability and wealth in rich countries. Another little-used perspective was global village, which considers poverty as standing in the way of a sustainable future for all. Finally, the infrequently-used blame us perspective suggests that the rich world harms the poor world. The last two perspectives, global village and blame us, played a role in newspaper articles, albeit not prominently. In NGO-campaigns, they were almost completely absent.

The absence of the global village perspective in NGO-campaigns is especially remarkable. This perspective underlies communications from, for example, UN organisations and aid agencies about the Sustainable Development Goals. During the period of data collection, these goals were being brought forward and discussed in the international meetings and conferences as the successors to the Millennium Development Goals. Although the NGO sector broadly embraced the goals and took an active part in the international debate, they barely used the global village perspective in their campaigns for the public.

The final two absentee frames were those that essentially do not regard poverty as a problem, or in any case not a problem that the developed countries should address. The first is the chain of being frame, which considers poverty as a natural condition that the poor must accept. The second perspective is ‘every man for himself’, which regards poverty as the responsibility of poor people themselves. The absence of these frames is understandable for NGOs, who owe their existence to resolving the poverty issue. Using frames that de-problematise poverty does not serve that purpose. Likewise, newspapers generally focus on problems and wrongs that must be resolved. Consequently, frames that do not problematise issues may be considered less useful.

6.3.2 Causes of poverty

Both newspapers and NGOs presented the poverty problem predominantly as a local issue. Newspaper coverage suggested that problems in developing countries were related to internal causes such as poor governance, poor leadership, wars and conflicts. Most NGO-advertisements, in turn, did not reveal obvious causes for problems in developing countries; hunger, disease, injustice and lack of development were a given. In addition, the role of the West received little attention. For example, political decisions of governments and consumption patterns in the developed world were rarely presented as a cause of problems in the South. Frames that highlighted the liability of the West, notably blame us and global village, were used infrequently by newspapers and hardly at all by NGOs. In short, both newspapers and NGOs communicated that ‘we’ in the West are not liable for problems in developing countries.

Moreover, both news media and NGOs highlighted the seemingly never-ending misery. In fact, over the past decades, developing countries have made impressive improvements in the areas of poverty reduction, education, health and access to water. However, this trend of slow (and sometimes fast) progress and declining poverty was not reflected in the media coverage. Newspapers paid relatively little attention to issues such as food security, health and education, and when they did, the emphasis was usually on the problems that are still there. That does not mean that newspapers never published stories about positive trends. They did. But such stories were overshadowed by a much larger number of stories that highlighted problems, difficulties and disasters. Development organisations, in turn, almost exclusively communicated about issues such as health, education and food security – areas in which great progress has been made. But few of their advertisements highlighted the results that had been achieved; the focus was on the existing needs and things that needed to be done. The findings are consistent with existing research into the representation of poverty, which has also highlighted the media’s emphasis on local causes of poverty, its lack of attention to a wider historical and global context, and its portrayal of the seemingly endless state of misery in developing countries (Dogra, 2012; Kennedy, 2009; Lugo-Ocando, 2015; Manzo, 2008).

6.3.3 Responsibility to end poverty

With respect to strategies to end poverty, both news media and NGOs suggested that the responsibility lay primarily with the West or the internati-
onal community. News media frequently emphasised that ‘our’ governments and institutions must act, for example, through emergency assistance or by paying for climate change adaptation and mitigation. They published less about local governments, organisations and citizens in developing countries who contributed to solutions.

NGOs, in turn, suggested that Western developing organisations and donors were in charge of changing the situation. This may sound self-evident, since most advertisements had a fundraising purpose. However, during the analysis we specifically examined whether the advertisements also showed local initiatives of community leaders, teachers or health workers, for example. This was rarely the case; people were mostly portrayed as needy and receiving. Hence, most of the advertisements in the Netherlands and Flanders, and almost all advertisements in the UK, suggested that the agency for change was solely with the Western organisations and donors. This is remarkable, since most of the large private aid organisations work through or with local NGOs and community organisations.

In line with this, local governance was completely missing as a change perspective. During the analysis, it was noted that newspapers hardly ever reported on good or improving governance, decreasing violence and democratic developments in developing countries. The ‘governance’ frame was used almost exclusively in a problematising context, emphasising bad governance. In addition, development organisations brought a non-political message, and rarely explained, for example, how development cooperation had played or could play a role or in resolving conflicts or improving the functioning of the government.

6.3.4 Problematising the poverty issue: differences between countries

When comparing the framing patterns in the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders, it was obvious that the similarities were greater than the differences. Regarding the newspaper framing in the three countries, the most important frames were the same, and the least important frames were the same. Likewise, the overly negative tone of voice in the articles was visible in each country. Hence, the main difference between the countries was related to the communications by NGOs, with a gap between the UK on the one hand and Netherlands and Flanders on the other hand. More specifically, the difference was related to the dissemination of ‘problematising’ imagery of people in developing countries. ‘Problematising’ was defined as emphasising victimhood and pitifulness, and emphasising dependence and endless misery. British NGOs contributed to such imagery much stronger than the Dutch and Flemish. Also, Dutch and Flemish NGOs frequently cast their message in the context of social justice – something British NGOs did much less often. In conclusion, British NGO-campaigns chose a much more one-sided victim approach than the Dutch and Flemish.

These findings partly explain the attention in the literature for the use of victim imagery; many studies were based on British data, where this type of imagery is still used frequently. However, the current study shows that this finding is not representative of all European countries. This raises the question of where the differences between the UK and The Netherlands and Flanders originate. It is possible that competition for private donor funding is higher in the UK, which could encourage NGOs to use more explicit imagery to draw people’s attention. Also, different origins of charitable organisations could have contributed to differences in charity culture. For example, in the UK there is traditionally a strong influence from the Anglican church; in the Netherlands, involvement in the third world was strongly inspired by a rights approach. It was beyond the scope of this study to compare the characteristics and funding strategies of the NGO sector in the three countries.

6.3.5 Media frames, journalists and the audience

The research explored the links between media frames, public perceptions and perceptions of journalists. This framing process is shown in Figure 1.1. This section connects the investigation into public perceptions with the investigation of journalist’s perceptions. This is done with a caveat: the research of public perceptions was based on British data, while the study of journalist perceptions was restricted to a Dutch target group. Hence, we cannot state with certainty that the findings are valid in other countries.

Nevertheless, it was noticeable that some poverty narratives were visible in all stages of the communication process, while others were not. A revolving narrative was that of bad governance in developing countries; journalists identified most strongly with this perspective, and it was one of the main perspectives in the news media coverage. It was also strongly reflected in public perceptions of developing countries. However, two other narratives were not revolving. To begin with, it applied to the narrative of the poor as victims of unfortunate circumstances. This perspective was clearly visible in media content and in public perceptions. However, it was not really shared by the journalists in our study, who identified only weakly with this frame.
In addition, a narrative that was not widely embraced by the journalists was that of enduring misery in developing countries. The tale of ‘no progress’ was reflected in the media coverage and in people’s perceptions of developing countries. However, this study found that most of the journalists who write about the topic know that poverty is declining.

It seems obvious that journalists have a more elaborate view on the issue than their readers. They know more about the historical and global context of poverty and are less stuck in the victim’s narrative than the audience. However, since their coverage is largely driven by current events and news values, they do not reflect this rather elaborate view in their articles. Consequently, they probably advance a version of the poverty narrative that differs from the version they have in mind.

6.4 Scientific relevance and suggestions for future research

6.4.1 Reflection on theory and method

The introduction section argued that a frame analysis was an appropriate method to study the representation of global poverty in the media. In retrospect, it has been a method with specific characteristics, some of which influenced the nature and scope of this study. To begin with, framing is an interpretive method. Detecting frames is done by people and the outcome depends on the meaning that human coders give to a text. Following strict procedures during the inductive and deductive phases reduced the chance of researcher bias. The coding process was done by different coders who reached sufficient levels of intercoder reliability. Moreover, the frames were validated through member checks with development experts and communication professionals. However, personal influence can never be eliminated completely; different researchers would probably have arrived at a slightly different arrangement of frames during the inductive phase. Hence, the validity of the frames – are they understood and recognised by stakeholders? – was more important than their reproducibility.

Moreover, the framing methodology classifies different perspectives on a meta level. This comes at a cost of a certain nuance. For example, messages with a progress frame addressed different topics, ranging from macro-economic trends to local health care. They also had very different news angles, ranging from economic consequences to human interest, and they could focus on people, institutions or macro-trends. The frame analysis was not detailed enough to bring such differences to light.

However, overall, the framing method brought huge benefits for the study. The main advantage was that it enabled the systematic analysis of large samples of news articles and NGO-communications, and, consequently, to measure differences between countries and between news media and NGOs. Moreover, the method made it possible to study the presence of various poverty representations throughout the communication process; frames were detectable in communicating texts, but also in the minds of the media audience and of journalists. In addition, the framing method provided a nuanced understanding of the diversity of poverty representations, which went far beyond previously used classifications into ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ portrayals.

Although it was not a primary objective of this study to advance the framing methodology, the chosen approach has an innovative aspect that other studies could benefit from. The quantitative frame analysis used a combination of two existing methods: an analysis based on a codebook, and a holistic frame analysis. The codebook method starts from a list with interpretive questions to identify frames in a text. In general, three or four questions are prepared for each frame. Answers are counted and their number determines to what extent a frame is present in a text. The holistic method, by contrast, does not use a questionnaire. Coders are familiarised with the description of the frames and then simply state if a certain frame is present in a text or not.

As in holistic studies, the coders were familiarised with the global poverty frames and they simply indicated which frames were present in the text. However, in codebook studies, they had a list with interpretative questions at hand. This enabled them to check whether their assessment was correct; if answers to each of the interpretative questions was ‘no’, the frame was probably not present. An advantage over the mere holistic method was that this reduced the chance of personal bias when coding the text. Moreover, the coding and processing of the results was less time consuming than in a conventional codebook analysis. Using this method, the coders identified six different frames at once and reached sufficient intercoder reliability, thereby limiting the chances of researcher bias.

6.4.2 Scientific and societal relevance

As stated in the introduction chapter, existing studies on the representations of global poverty are based on thin empirical evidence. This research has markedly increased the empirical knowledge about poverty representations in
the media. It is the first that mapped different representations systematically through a frame analysis. It is also the first study that empirically measured the frequency of global poverty representations in both news articles and NGO-commercials, and in different countries. It revealed that media representations were built with a variety of frames, none of which dominated the coverage. The study also enhanced the discussion about the media’s portrayal of people in poverty as pitiful victims, who are visibly suffering and dependent on outside help. It showed that this discussion was especially applicable to British NGOs, but not to Dutch and Flemish NGOs, and not to newspapers.

Next to this, the systematic mapping of global poverty representations made it possible to study their presence throughout the communication process. A clear correspondence was found between media frames and audience frames, and this strengthened existing evidence of the media’s reinforcement of public perceptions. Finally, the research increased the knowledge about the role of journalists during the creation of poverty frames in the media. Existing studies of the frame building of global poverty made assumptions based on a content analysis of the articles. By contrast, this study investigated the thinking of the journalists directly. To this end, an additional survey among journalists has provided valuable insight into the gaps between the journalist’s cognitive frames and the media frames in their articles. It suggests that forces such as news values and sources, and not the personal affinities of the journalists, moderate the framing process in the newsroom.

Besides contributing to the literature, the study is of societal relevance. Various stakeholders, such as NGOs, policymakers and journalists, can use the frame matrix as a toolkit. The description of frames can help them to reflect on the frames they use in their communication and to consider alternatives. For example, British NGOs could use it to formulate alternatives to the victim frame. In addition, journalists could use the matrix to consider alternative angles for their stories. Next, stakeholders, notably NGOs, can use the matrix to understand the lines of reasoning of others, such as critics of their work. The matrix can help them to formulate counter frames. Finally, the study of poverty framing in the various stages of the communication process could increase awareness about the potential impact of media frames on the perceptions of the public and feed the popular discussion on this topic.

6.4.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Nevertheless, the study had several limitations. First, the objective was to study the framing of global poverty in the European media. The country comparison included three countries and regions, and the findings showed that the framing was country specific to a certain extent. However, the inclusion of three countries was a limitation. It would be interesting to involve more countries in future research.

Another limitation of the study was its focus on newspaper articles – the second most important source of their knowledge on the topic to television at the time of the study (European Commission, 2015). However, the media landscape is changing rapidly. Online news has taken over from print media as the main news provider. Younger generations especially rely heavily on social media to be informed. Serious news and fake news alternate on these media, and the public does not always differentiate between them. Some studies have highlighted significant differences between online and print media. For example, research by Redden (2011) found that alternative news websites frame local poverty quite differently than the mainstream media. However, it is not yet clear if, and how, different media channels and various types of news influence the framing of global poverty, and how that impacts people’s understanding of the topic. Future research could illuminate framing differences between various news media sources.

Third, the findings are subject to changes. News framing is a dynamic process, and certain frames may become more or less popular over time. This research has tried to eliminate the influence of short term news cycles, which occur, for example, immediately after a disaster, by selecting data over a period of three years. However, in the years after our investigation, much media attention was given to the refugee issue. That issue is communicated, among others, through the impending doom frame, in which poverty is a threat to security and wealth in the West. Hence, it is possible that this perspective has gained importance in the years after the research.

A fourth limitation concerns the relation between media representations and public perceptions. This relation has not been examined directly, and not over time. Consequently, the study does not provide solid proof that changes in public perception are spurred on by changes in media coverage, and not vice versa. Longitudinal research into this topic would be at the service of another area of study that deserves attention: understanding the impact of NGO fundraising messages on public engagement with global poverty. NGOs are often motivated to use pitiful images by referring to internal research, in which they present different versions of a fundraising campaign to a panel. Generally, they conclude that the version with the ‘saddest picture’ scores best, thus justifying the use of pathetic images in their campaigns. However,
such research on short-term effects on giving behaviour blocks the view of other effects. For example, some other studies found that ‘negative’ fundrais-
ing messages made people feel anxious, miserable, hopeless and overwhelm-
ed (Hudson, Dasandi, Gaines, 2016; YouGov, 2014). The consequences of such messages for the longer-term engagement with global poverty have not yet been systematically investigated.

A fifth and final limitation concerns the role perception of journalists. The investigation showed that journalists exercised restraint; their personal frame preference played no major role in the stories they wrote. News values and information from sources were more important drivers of the frame building process. However, it was beyond the scope of this study to investigate whether they found this desirable, and whether they felt that they provided the public with a desired portrayal of the situation in developing countries.

6.5 Discussion and implications for NGOs and news media

This final section reflects on the study’s significance for the discussion on poverty representations and for the practice of media and NGOs. This is done from a normative point of departure, namely, that public engagement with poverty in developing countries is important. The assumption in this study is that unilaterally problematising portrayals of people in poverty can undermi-
ne this engagement. This section consists of six parts. The first part discusses the mutual differences between NGOs, newspapers and developing regions. The second and third parts subsequently argue that the discussion about the colonial discourse and ‘pitiful imagery’ are not over. The fourth part states that public engagement with global poverty is undermined by the media’s lack of attention for slow progress and good governance. The fifth and sixth sections review the implications of the study for NGOs and news media.

6.5.1 Differences between newspapers, NGOs and developing regions

This study primarily looked at the overall picture of the portrayal of global poverty. However, during the investigation it was noted that mutual differences between NGOs and between newspapers were substantial. Moreover, this study treated ‘developing countries’ as one, without considering the differences between the portrayal of Africa and other regions. An additional analysis of the Dutch dataset of news articles and NGO-advertisements expounded a number of these differences (Vossen, 2015). Although this analysis was not part of the empirical chapters, the findings are an important addition to the research results.

First, the type of campaign matters greatly for the framing of the story; emergency appeals are clearly dominated by the victim frame. In the Dutch dataset, the frame was seen in 83 per cent of the emergency appeals versus 30 per cent of the non-emergency advertisements. The same was true for ‘pitiful imagery’ of visibly suffering people. They appeared in 41 per cent of the emer-
gency appeals and in just 8 per cent of the other advertisements. Also, the differences between NGOs are substantial. It was noted that the material of some NGOs, such as Save the Children, almost exclusively contained a victim frame, while the material of others, such as Oxfam and HIVOS, rarely did. However, the datasets per NGO were too small to make comparisons between them and draw conclusions.

A second observation concerns the differences between the Dutch newspapers. The framing pattern varied greatly between them. For example, De Telegraaf used the victim frame twice as often as de Volkskrant (31% versus 14%), which means that readers of de Volkskrant are confronted with a dif-
fefent picture of poverty in developing countries than readers of De Telegraaf. Likewise, NRC Handelsblad employed the bad governance frame almost three times as often as regional newspapers (35% versus 13%). Moreover, the in-
vestigation looked at the tone of voice in Dutch articles that specifically dealt with development aid or development organisations. The tone of voice in ar-
ticles on development aid was generally neutral or slightly positive. This was especially true for regional newspapers and De Telegraaf, which, for example, paid attention to the commitment of Dutch development workers in Africa or Asia. However, the tone of voice was very different in comments, letters to the editor and opinion pieces. They were predominantly critical to very critical of development aid, especially in De Telegraaf. Only in regional newspapers did the tone in opinion articles remain neutral to slightly positive.

A third and final observation concerns the portrayal of people from various regions in the developing world. As was noted in the introduction, the imagery debate mainly revolves around people from Africa. Hence, it was investigated whether (people from) Africa were framed differently than (people from) other regions. More specifically, the study was interested in whether messages about Africa would contain a victim frame more often than messages from other regions. In absolute terms, that was true, simply because
Africa was the most common developing region in newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements. In relative terms, however, it was not true. The region that was almost exclusively identified through the victim frame was not Africa but the Middle East. That was the case in newspaper photos and NGO-advertisements, and the war in Syria was responsible for that. In communications about Africa, the victim frame was not used more often than expected. In conclusion, the topicality, not Africa as such, predicted the occurrence of victim imagery. This finding was true for NGOs and newspapers in Flanders and the United Kingdom as well.

6.5.2 The colonial discourse is not over

The introduction chapter discussed the prevalence of ‘colonial’ and ‘post-colonial’ discourse in the media representations in the West. Colonial discourse is characterised by the representation of developing countries as primitive and backward and the emphasis on differences between ‘us’ in the developed world and ‘them’ in underdeveloped Africa or Asia. Two archetypes in this discourse are the ‘noble savage’, who is primitive but good, and the ‘dangerous savage’, who is uncivilised and murderous. In addition, post-colonial discourse has informed policy debates from the era of independence. They include, for example, narratives about growth and development, about unequal global power distribution and about sustainability.

It would be too simplistic to state, as some critics argue, that the colonial discourse dominates the media coverage; the alternation of poverty perspectives in the media was too substantial to warrant such a conclusion. Moreover, post-colonial discourse was clearly visible in current media representations. For example, the dependency-school discourse of unequal global power relations was reflected through the social justice and blame us frame, the modernist development narrative of the ‘Millennium Development Goals’ was reflected through the progress frame, and the sustainability narrative, which underpins the current Sustainable Development Goals, was put forward by the global village frame.

Nevertheless, the research showed that elements of colonial discourse were still present. Two points highlight this observation. First, the media coverage emphasised the continuing misery and lack of progress in developing countries, and the idea that ‘we’ should help them. Consequently, it reinforced the colonial stereotype of developing countries as stagnant, backward and dependent, and the West as developed and mature. British NGOs especially regularly underscored this backwardness with images of malnourished children, alone and naked and in a dry African landscape, who need money from Western donors to survive.

Second, the colonial archetypes were still out there. The ‘noble savage’, innocent and good, was visible in the NGO-imagery of disadvantaged people, notably women and children – always harmless, sympathetic and caring. The ‘dangerous savage’ lived on in the numerous stories of power-hungry leaders and elites and fighting ethnic groups. The presence of corrupt officials and elites was almost a cliché in news reports on governance in developing countries, especially in Africa. In addition, more subtle representations of ‘dangerous savages’ were hidden in news messages and NGO-campaigns that drew attention to ‘barbaric’ practices in developing countries, such as child trafficking, child marriage and female genital mutilation. Because newspapers and NGO-advertisements rarely spread counter-narratives, for instance, on general progress in these areas or local initiatives that try to put an end to it, they fed the idea that these kinds of ‘primitive’ practices are completely normal in developing regions.

6.5.3 The discussion about ‘pitiful imagery’ is not over

While writing this dissertation, the discussion about ‘pitiful imagery’ continued unabated. On the one hand, there are NGOs who say that they rely on the need for such images to recruit funds. On the other hand are the critical action groups who find this disrespectful. In theory, this discussion should be resolved by the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages that NGOs themselves have drawn up (Concord, 2012). This code encourages NGOs ‘to choose images and messages that respect human dignity’. Dochas, the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations, translated this into an image book with ‘recommended’ and ‘non-recommended’ statements (Dochas, 2014). Non-recommended, for example, are images of children that are being portrayed as ‘alone, without clothes, and starving’ and ‘cropped out of context to exaggerate their vulnerability and destitution’ (p. 10).

In practice, however, unanimity about the Code of Conduct appears to be far-reaching. During the analysis, it was noted that NGOs such as Save the Children, Concern and Action Aid advertise with images that are almost figurative to the non-recommended examples of Dochas. Significantly, the discussion was raised in the Netherlands in 2013 following a fundraising campaign of Save the Children, with a close-up of a crying and malnourished African girl. The IDLeaks action group found it ‘disrespectful and stigmatising’ and
filed a complaint with Partos, the Dutch NGO-umbrella (Vice Versa, 2013a). Save the Children rejected the claim by stating that other images unfortunately had not triggered action and that it was the wish of the girls’ parents that these images be broadcast (Vice Versa, 2013b). The complaints committee of Partos agreed with Save the Children and did not regard the video unethical and disrespectful.

Thus, the discussion about the use of ‘pitiful imagery’ seems to be on a dead track. This idea was strengthened during the investigation through talks with communications staff of dozens of NGOs from various European countries. Many feel a tension between the desire to spread a balanced imaging with the need to recruit funds. This research cannot break this impassion. It suggests that NGOs can use alternatives to the victim frame, such as progress, social justice and global village. However, it does not answer the question of how NGOs can recruit funds with them.

Nevertheless, this study suggests that the discussion could continue by asking other questions. Currently, the question that is often asked is, Which version of our campaign generates most donations within the chosen approach (for example, advertising, marketing (DM), or direct response television (DRTV)? Alternatively, the question could be, How do we maintain our income without feeding the public with an image of perpetual misery and helplessness in developing countries? That question is no longer just about frames, but also about the chosen method of recruiting funds. For example, DRTV aims to touch the viewers’ emotions to such an extent that they instantly pick up the phone to make a donation. That works much better with an emotional image of a starving child than, say, a story about a poor but powerful female entrepreneur. In such case, changing the frame does not make sense without changing the fundraising method.

6.5.4 Slow progress and good governance: ‘blind spots’ in the media coverage

Public engagement with global poverty could benefit if two areas received more attention in the media coverage. The first is slow progress; longer-term positive trends, such as declining child mortality and the decrease of conflicts and war deaths, rarely make the headlines. It is not ‘news’ and it does not raise funds. The relation between sombre news and overly negative public perceptions has been discussed throughout this study. It argues that the media’s lack of attention on positive trends nurtures the conviction of the public that developing countries are a place of eternal misery; whatever has been attempted to reduce poverty has obviously not helped. Hence, the argument here is that different media attention, with a more prominent focus on progress and advancements, may help to forward a more accurate worldview. With respect to international development cooperation, this could help to restore or retain people’s confidence that efforts to end poverty have made a difference.

The same applies for another underrepresented area in the media coverage: good governance in developing countries. As stated before, NGOs avoided this topic, while the news media’s coverage of this issue was one-sided and predictable. There was no counter-narrative in the media for the bad governance story. Moreover, the narrative of corruption and corrupt leaders in developing countries was reinforced throughout the communication process; it was strongly present in media reports, in the perceptions of the journalists and in public perceptions.

A question here is whether news media ignore the topic because ‘good’ or ‘improving’ governance simply does not exist, or because journalists do not think it is worth covering. While our research does not provide evidence for either statement, it suggests that the latter is certainly the case. To begin with, ‘good governance’ is a desired condition. As such, it does not meet the criteria for what journalists call ‘newsworthy’ – namely, that it deviates from normality. Second, journalists have a duty to hold power to account. This contributes to their tendency to report about failing leaders, not about improving governance.

Hence, this study argues that newspaper coverage would gain in depth if it were more interested in covering successful interventions of local governments and local initiatives to improve governance. Moreover, it would be more complete if it followed countries’ transitions after wars and conflicts have ended, not just when they flare up. Meanwhile, the unilateral focus on bad governance undermines people’s confidence in development cooperation. If stories of corrupt officials and crooked leaders are endlessly repeated, it is easy to arrive at the conclusion that aid money is also likely to end up in the wrong pockets. Given the high public perceptions in Europe of waste of aid and corruption (e.g., Black 2014; TNS, 2010), this is exactly what is happening.
6.5.5 Implications for NGO’s: rethink the need for ‘pitiful imagery’, visualise local initiative, talk about progress and corruption

The two final sections elaborate on the findings and discussion and present specific recommendations for news media and NGOs. NGOs are concerned about weakening public engagement in development cooperation. In this context, the thesis raises several questions about their own communication strategy. The study suggests, first, that there is a need for British NGOs to rethink the use of ‘pitiful images’ for fundraising. This study did not examine the effect of various frames on the giving behaviour of donors. Nevertheless, the country comparison of NGO-framing sheds new light on this discussion. The wide use of explicit victim imagery by British NGOs suggests that they believe they need them to survive. However, the fact that Dutch and Flemish NGOs use them sparingly questions this premise. Apparently, NGOs from those regions have no problem surviving without resorting to the stereotypical hungry, naked and lonely African child.

One obvious explanation is that such imagery increases the willingness of people to donate. However, a comparison of the giving behaviour of the British and the Dutch does not support that claim. According to the World Giving Index, both countries are in the top 10 of the most generous countries. Moreover, the Dutch donate more per person to international charities than the British. Also, during the time of investigation, donations to international charities slightly increased in both countries (Bekkers, Schuyt, & Gouwenberg, 2015; CAF, 2011, 2014a, 2014b). Hence, the question remains whether other conditions in the UK make the use of pathetic images for fundraising essential, or whether British NGOs cling to a practice that is obsolete.

In the Netherlands and Flanders, the discussion about fundraising imagery deserves a different accent. Although their NGOs were more careful with the use of pitiful imagery, their advertisements also contained problematising elements; only a small portion of them highlighted the local initiative to combat poverty, for example, by teachers, entrepreneurs and health workers. This is at odds with the premise of Western NGOs that local initiative and ownership are the engines of change. Although this principle is set in stone for the sector, they do not picture it in their advertisements for the public. It must be noted that NGOs usually give examples of local initiative on their websites and in their annual reports. However, relatively few people make the effort to look at them, while many more are confronted with campaign advertisements on television and in newspapers. If NGOs think it is important that their audiences know that people in developing countries are at the steering wheel, they must show it in their messages to the public.

A second point regards the communicating of results. NGO-advertisements emphasise that children are hungry, girls are married off or villages have no clean water. The ongoing emphasis on existing needs highlights the urgency of their interventions, but also reinforces the perception that there has been no progress. As was discussed in the previous section, this may eventually undermine people’s belief in the credibility of their work. If NGOs want to engage or re-engage the public, they need to tell them what has been achieved – not just on their website, but also in the media where they publish their fundraising messages.

Finally, NGOs should talk about corruption. The public has strong perceptions that most development money ends up in the wrong pockets. They do not get that picture from development agencies, but from the news media. Nevertheless, the perception that ‘aid money disappears through corruption’ should worry NGOs. First, it affects their reputation and credibility. Second, it gives people an easy excuse not to donate. Third, those perceptions are probably grossly exaggerated. NGOs’ strategy is not to mention corruption to prevent people from thinking about the elephant in the room. However understandable this may be, public perceptions will not change by leaving this topic to the news media. Moreover, some studies suggest that it is possible for the NGO sector to talk about corruption, without losing the confidence of donors; people are willing to tolerate corruption to a certain extent if they are convinced that aid brings about improvements (Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2014; YouGov, 2014).

6.5.6 Implications for news media: rethink ‘newsworthiness’, bear responsibility for the impact of stories

The news media mostly emphasise the negative – and the coverage of developing countries is no exception to that general rule. This study argues that the media thereby feed the public with overly sombre views on progress in developing countries. While most journalists know that extreme poverty has fallen, the majority of their public is oblivious of that fact.

This touches upon the question of if, and to what extent, the media bear responsibility for the public perceptions that they feed. This question has been asked before by philosophers like Wijnberg (2013) and De Botton (2014). In recent books, they criticise the media’s fondness of sensational news events, such as crimes, wars and the excesses of celebrities. According to both aut-
hors, news blocks our view of normality. Following their line of thought, news about developing countries, with its emphasis on disasters, wars and misery, blocks people’s view of the reality of ordinary people in those countries.

This research calls for a more constructive journalistic approach to reporting on developing countries. Constructive journalism propagates new approaches and methods to supplement existing practices, based on the key principle that the media bear responsibility for the impact of their work. Constructive approaches, for example, explore possible solutions instead of just highlighting conflicts and problems – as this study suggests regarding local governance. Another example of a constructive approach is the promotion of a fact-based worldview, as this study does with its plea for more attention to slow progress. Constructive approaches are not necessarily new, but as a movement it has gained importance over the past years. Various Scandinavian, Dutch, British and Flemish media currently experiment with constructive approaches. Examples are De Correspondent (www.decorrespondent.nl), a Dutch online news medium, and World’s Best News (www.worldsbestnews.org), a network in five European countries that informs people about progress in the developing world.

If news media accept the principle that they bear responsibility for the consequences of their work, their coverage should have an additional focus. First, news media should find ways to pay attention to slow progress in developing countries. They could, for example, mention facts about longer term positive trends when covering a crisis or setback. Second, news media should pay attention to improving governance, peace and stability, or to local initiatives that contribute to it. Such an approach is preceded by a reconsideration of what is relevant and newsworthy to cover. News values are not set in stone; they are characteristics that media workers assign to issues and events. As long as news values such as drama, conflict and bad news are the prime drivers of story selection in the newsroom, the news media will continue to present a limited representation of the developing world.


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Poverty in developing countries is a distant issue for most Europeans. They do not encounter it in their daily lives and, on average, are not particularly interested in it. Their perceptions of developing countries are usually coloured by hunger, sickness, drought and other misery. Many people have doubts about the effectiveness of development cooperation; they think we should help, but at the same time, they think that it does not really make a difference.

This study is inspired by concerns about public support for poverty reduction and international cooperation in Europe. It raises questions about the underlying perceptions of developing countries, and, more specifically, about the role of the media in forming public opinion. Hence, the main objective of this study is to gain insight into the current representation of global poverty and development cooperation in Europe.

A critical discussion about the media representation of people in developing countries has been raging for decades. It focuses primarily on the use of ‘pitiful images’ for fundraising purposes – for example, images of children with hungry bellies. Action groups and scientists speak negatively about this type of portrayal, because it would be stigmatising and stereotyping, and because it would ultimately contribute to aid fatigue. They often point at the historical relationship between the West and the South and argue that ‘colonial discourse’, in which people in developing countries are portrayed as backward, primitive and violent, still leaves a mark on media representations and public perceptions.

Anyone who follows these discussions could easily conclude that the media mostly spread stereotypical images of pitiful people in developing countries. However, little is known about these media representations. Empirical studies are scarce and they are often limited to British data, or to specific issues, such as the coverage of a certain famine. The purpose of this research is to increase the empirical knowledge about the media representation of poverty in developing countries. It maps the diversity of poverty representations and shows which of them we see often. In addition, this study highlights the relationship between media portrayals and the perceptions of the public. Finally, it analyses the perceptions of journalists who write about poverty in developing countries reports. The central research question is:

What stories about global poverty are narrated in Europe?

Narratives about poverty come to life in different places. We see them in news articles and in the campaigns of development agencies; they are in the minds of people who write about developing countries and in the minds of ordinary citizens. In four successive empirical chapters, this is discussed. The study took place in three countries: England, Netherlands and Belgium. Belgian data are restricted to Dutch-speaking Flanders. The choice of three countries makes it possible to compare data and see how they are country specific. The study also focuses on both news media and NGO-messages, because the public identifies both as major senders of information on developing countries. The attention is paid to messages that people spontaneously encounter, such as newspaper articles and campaign ads on television.

A frame analysis is chosen as the main research method. Frames are meta-communicative messages that give meaning to the world around us. Each frame contains several elements; it defines the problem, explains causes, consequences and solutions, and transmits a moral message. These elements may not be visible in every message. If, for example, we are confronted with images of hungry people (victim frame), we understand that they make a moral appeal to our help.

Framing occurs at different times in the communication process, and frames manifest themselves in different places. They emerge in the mind of a journalist who writes an article, or in the mind of a campaign creator who invents a new advertisement. They are reflected in news messages and campaign commercials, and they end up in the minds of readers and viewers, who mix these media frames with their existing knowledge, experience and values. The above implies that frames are not tied to an individual. They occur in a broader social context and are part of the collective memory of a large group of people. Both transmitters and receivers of frames draw from the same pool of cultural frames when they create or interpret a message.
The battle of ideas about global poverty

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to identify the range of poverty frames. The sub-question in this chapter is: Which frames are used to represent global poverty and how are these frames employed to defend various positions on international development cooperation? Identifying frames is done via an inductive framing analysis, based on texts and images with outspoken views on poverty. They range from, for example, political party programmes and NGO-campaigns to the Bible. These texts are examined for words, phrases and metaphors that define the poverty issue, or say something about the causes, consequences, solutions and moral responsibility. The result is a matrix with nine logical, mutually different ‘stories’ about poverty. The validity and consistency is tested based on a larger dataset of NGO-advertisements and newspaper articles.

Nine poverty frames

Frame 1. Victim. The poor are victims of tragic circumstances beyond their control. They suffer from lack of food, shelter, medical care and security. The frame makes a strong moral appeal to ‘the rich’ to help.

Frame 2. Progress. Poverty is an issue of lack of development. The poor world needs to catch up to the rich world. Solutions lie in economic development and the improvement of health, education, food production and infrastructure.

Frame 3. Social Justice. Poverty is an issue of injustice and inequality. Societies are arranged in an unfair manner and the poor do not get enough freedom and opportunity to shape their lives. The solution is a fairer distribution of wealth and opportunities.

Frame 4. Bad Governance. Poverty stems from failing governance in developing countries. Leaders and elites are corrupt and fraudulent and inflame conflicts. The solution lies in improving local governance and leadership.

Frame 5. Global Village. In a globalising world, all countries and people are connected. Rich and poor countries have a joint responsibility to solve cross-border problems, of which the poor bear the heaviest burden.

Frame 6. Blame Us. The rich world harms the poor world. In the past, through colonisation and slavery; today by exploitation and unfair trade systems. We enrich ourselves at their expense. The solution to the global problem of poverty lies in the West.

Frame 7. Every Man for Himself. Each person is responsible for his or her own wealth and destiny. It is the responsibility of poor people and countries to change their situation. Rich countries should not interfere, unless it serves their own economic and political interests.

Frame 8. Impending Doom. The rich are potential victims of poverty. The effects of global poverty can be felt in rich societies, by, for example, uncontrolled migration, international terrorism and deadly epidemics. Rich countries must protect themselves.

Frame 9. Chain of Being. Poverty is static. The world just as it is; everything has its place and the poor must accept whatever happens to them in life. Poverty does not need to make them unhappy if they accept their fate.

Frames in the debate on development cooperation

The chapter then examines how these frames are used in the discussion on development cooperation. This is done through an analysis of NGO-advertisements and newspaper articles about the subject. Two main issues dominate the discussion. The first question is why we should get involved in development cooperation. The second question is whether development cooperation is effective. Seven frames play a role in either debate. In the first debate, NGOs defend the view that we have a moral obligation to commit ourselves to the other. For that purpose, they use the victim and social justice frames. In contrast, politicians especially highlight the self-interest of development cooperation through the impending doom frame (it protects us against terrorism and migration) and the every man for himself frame (it is good for our businesses). The global village frame can break the deadlock between ‘their’ and ‘our’ interest by pointing out the common importance of addressing cross-border issues.

The second discussion mainly involves the progress frame and the bad governance frame. NGOs use the progress frame to emphasise that development aid improves people’s lives. Critical opinion leaders, on the other hand, use this frame to maintain that results are lacking or disappointing. The bad governance frame is used only by opponents in this debate, such as in Internet forums. They argue that aid money is being wasted and that development cooperation promotes corruption. It was noted that this frame is rarely countered.
In search of the pitiful victim

Chapter 3 examines the frequency of the poverty frames as described in Chapter 2 in newspaper articles and advertisements of NGOs in England, the Netherlands and Flanders. It also investigates to what extent the media display ‘problematising representations’ of people in developing countries. Such representations explicitly depict the suffering of people; they are visibly starving, sick, injured or crying; they are victims and are dependent on aid. Their suffering is explicitly portrayed (hungry, sick, wounded, crying). The study is based on a representative sample of 876 articles and 403 photos from five British, seven Dutch and four Flemish newspapers, and a non-representative sample of 284 NGO-advertisements of 44 Dutch, 24 British and 14 Flemish organisations. Data collection covers the years 2011, 2012 and 2013. For NGO-advertisements, they also cover January to March 2014. The analysis includes four of the nine frames: victim, progress, social justice and bad governance. The sub-question in this chapter is: Which frames are used most frequently in newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements in the UK, the Netherlands and Flanders? Are these frames country specific, and to what extent do problematising representations of poverty prevail in each of these countries?

Poverty frames in NGO-campaigns and newspapers

No single frame dominates the coverage of global poverty in the media. For newspapers, the progress frame is the most important, followed by the victim and bad governance frames. For NGOs, the victim frame is most important, followed by the social justice and progress frames (see Figure 3.3 and 3.4). There is a striking difference between England on the one hand, and the Netherlands and Flanders on other hand; British NGO-commercials were clearly dominated by the victim frame (78%). In the British material, it was seen twice as often as in the Dutch and Flemish materials.

The chapter then follows the criticism of ‘problematising’ representations of people in developing countries. To this end it looks specifically at newspaper pictures and visuals of NGOs. The main finding is that the media do not overwhelm us with explicit ‘pathetic victim images’ of suffering and starving people (see Figure 3.5). News media in the three countries use such images sparingly (EN and NL: 9%, FL: 12%) and the same goes for Dutch and Flemish NGOs (respectively, 14% and 10%). British NGOs, however, are an exception: one-third (34%) of their visual materials contains explicit ‘pathetic victim images’.

At the same time, it appears that (people in) developing countries are mainly portrayed as dependent on help or outside intervention. NGOs especially disseminate this portrayal, because they show little initiative from people and organisations in developing countries. Most of their advertisements only emphasise that foreign aid agencies, or Western donors, come or should come into action. The local initiative is even less visible in British campaigns than in Dutch and Flemish. This sheds new light on the way the media, particularly NGOs, play a role in forwarding ‘problematising images’ – not so much by using explicit ‘pathetic’ pictures or videos (except British NGOs), but mainly by suggesting that people rely on others and do not progress on their own.

Media frames and public perceptions of global poverty: is there a link?

This chapter connects the media representations with public opinions about poverty in developing countries. England serves as a case study. The sub-question is, How does the overarching media narrative about global poverty relate to the audience narrative about global poverty in the UK? The study consists of a framing and content analysis of media messages (newspaper articles and NGO-advertisements), for which the same dataset is used as in the previous chapter. In addition, nine public opinion surveys from the same period are analysed. Both media texts and opinion surveys are examined for their framing and their tone of voice, i.e., the extent to which the media message or the public emphasises negative or positive developments.

Three storylines surface from the analysis of media reports. First, the media frame poverty primarily as a matter of ‘victims’, ‘lack of development’ and ‘bad governance’; second, media reports locate the causes of poverty in developing countries, whereas the solution mainly should come from the outside; and third, media reports suggest – with their strong emphasis on problems, crises and corruption – that there is no progress or good governance in developing countries.

This media narrative is compared with recurrent and dominant themes, comments and replies in the public opinion polls. There are significant similarities. Like the media, the public considers poverty primarily as a local problem, which is characterised by misery and lack of development. The public is convinced that poverty levels have remained the same or have become worse in recent decades. This corresponds with the lack of media attention
for progress in developing countries. Public perceptions of corruption and dysfunctional governments in developing countries are strong, which is also consistent with the emphasis placed by newspapers on bad governance in developing countries. Both the media and the public give little attention to perspectives of social justice and the role of Western companies and organisations on the onset and persistence of poverty.

The study does not answer the question of to what extent media reports influence public opinion and vice versa. However, it suggests that there is a clear interaction between media and audience, and it suggests that the media are a powerful force in this interaction. One indication is that the audience says that this is the case, and regularly refers to the influence of the media on their view of the situation in developing countries. A second indication is that objectives of news media and NGOs encourage them to present a specific version of reality in developing countries – thereby leaving a mark on image formation. For NGOs it is fundraising, which motivates them to emphasise the poor living conditions and dependency. For newspapers, it is the need to bring ‘news’, which leads to an emphasis on problems and abuse instead of things that go well. As a result, the media coverage skews toward conflict, poor governance, disaster and misery, which are reflected in perceptions of the public.

Thinking and writing about poverty in developing countries

The final empirical chapter concerns the creation of poverty frames during the journalistic process. The specific question is, How do journalists’ cognitive frames and media routines influence the frame building of stories about global poverty in the Netherlands? The basis is a survey of 54 journalists from the Netherlands who regularly write about the subject. Their cognitive frames are compared to the frames in the articles (n=435) that they wrote on this subject between 15 August 2014 and 15 August 2016. Cognitive frames are individual mental schemata that people use to interpret the world around them. In this study, the cognitive frames of journalists are referred to as ‘journalist frames’.

The survey shows that the clear majority of journalists (72%) knows that extreme poverty in developing countries has fallen in recent decades. Among the Dutch public this fact is known by 18 per cent. Regarding the poverty frames, the journalists personally feel the most affinity with the bad governance frame, the social justice frame and the progress frame. Respectively, 98%, 85% and 82% of the participants indicated that this perspective ‘fully’ or ‘somewhat’ fit their personal vision of poverty. They feel the least affinity with the victim frame (43%). However, these journalists’ frames hardly connect with the frames in their articles. Only the few journalists with a preference for the victim frame also use this frame slightly more often than expected in their articles. For the other frames, the personal preferences of journalists do not predict how they frame their stories.

Journalists also answered the question of whether other factors determine the framing of their articles: news value, expectations of readers, profile of the medium, sources and available time and money. According to the journalists, newsworthiness and sources particularly have an influence on the chosen angle. According to the journalists, colleagues in the newsroom play no major role. Only 15 per cent stated that their influence is rather important, and none of the journalists said that the influence of their peers is very important. This is reflected in high perceptions of autonomy; participants say that their autonomy is very big (49%) or quite big (47%) during the writing of articles on this subject.

Conclusion and discussion

This final chapter returns to the main question: What stories about global poverty are narrated in Europe? It begins with a reflection on the media coverage and connects this with the discussion on problematising images and the colonial discourse. Subsequently, it reflects on the interaction between the media, journalists and the public. The chapter ends with recommendations for NGOs and journalists.

Poverty in the media: victims, stagnation, poor governance and social justice

When describing poverty, two frames are important for both newspapers and NGOs. The first is the progress frame, which defines poverty as lagging development. The second is the victim frame, which emphasises hardships and tragic circumstances. In addition, the bad governance frame is relevant for newspapers, while NGOs highlight the perspective of social justice. The remaining frames receive less attention. Therefore, poverty is described relatively infrequently as a problem in which the West has a liability; frames that emphasise the interaction between the West and the South (blame us, global village) are largely missing, and so is the frame that regards poverty as a threat
to the West (impending doom).

The media locate the causes of poverty predominantly in developing countries. Both newspapers and NGOs suggest that poverty is a local problem caused or exacerbated by, for example, poor governance, wars or natural disasters. Western political decisions or consumption patterns are rarely associated with poverty in developing countries. However, regarding the solution, the media tell a different story – this should come largely from the West or the international community. Newspapers and NGOs suggest, for instance, that Western governments, institutions and donors should provide development aid, or that the international community must address the effects of climate change. Local governments are missing almost completely as part of the solution.

**Differences between newspapers and between NGOs**

This study looked at the overall representation of poverty in developing countries in the media. However, during the investigation it was noted that there are substantial differences between newspapers and between NGOs. Also, the research did not distinguish between the portrayal of Africa and other regions in developing countries. An additional analysis of the Dutch datasets revealed a number of these differences.

A first observation is that the type of NGO-campaign is very important for the framing; the victim frame was mainly used in emergency aid campaigns (83%) and much less in other campaigns (30%). The same was true for explicit ‘pitiful images’; outside emergency aid campaigns, these were rarely used. A second observation is that the framing differs greatly from one newspaper to another. For example, readers of De Telegraaf are confronted with a victim frame twice as often than readers of de Volkskrant, and NRC Handelsblad readers encounter a bad government frame three times as often as readers of regional newspapers. The tone of voice in news articles and opinion articles on development cooperation also differed. In regional newspapers, the tone was the generally neutral; in opinion articles in De Telegraaf the tone was overwhelmingly negative.

A third observation concerns the representation of people from different regions in the developing world. The question was whether people from Africa were more likely to be portrayed as ‘victims’ than people from other regions. That was not the case. The region that was depicted almost exclusively through the victim frame was the Middle East, and the war in Syria was responsible for it. This was true for newspaper photos and NGO-advertisements in all three countries. The actuality, not Africa as such, determined where victim images came from.

**Discussions about colonial discourse and ‘pitiful imagery’ are not over**

This study ties in with existing discussions about problematising portrayals and colonial discourse. In colonial discourse, developing countries are represented as primitive and backward compared to the rich and developed West. Two archetypes in this discourse are the ‘noble savage’ – primitive and good – and the ‘dangerous savage’ – uncivilised and murderous. Colonial discourse does not dominate the media coverage. Nevertheless, some elements are clearly visible. British NGOs especially nurture the image of a poor and lagging Africa, with images of sad children all alone in an African landscape, who do not survive without money from Western donors. The colonial archetypes are also present. The ‘noble savage’ is reflected in NGO-advertisements of innocent women and children. The ‘dangerous savage’ lives on in stories of power-hungry leaders and elites and warring ethnic groups. The presence of corrupt elites is almost a cliché in the newspaper coverage.

The discussion about explicit ‘pitiful images’ of people in developing countries in campaigns of development agencies is also not over. On the one hand, there are critical action groups that find them unethical; on the other hand, NGOs emphasise the need for such images to recruit funds. This research cannot break this deadlock. Although it offers alternatives to the victim frame, it does not answer the question of how NGOs can recruit funds with them. However, the research suggests that the discussion could be revitalised by asking other questions. Instead of, ‘Which frame generates the most money?’ the question could be rephrased into, ‘How can NGOs raise funds without feeding the image of perpetual misery and dependence in developing countries?’

**Perpetuated stories about poverty**

Using the media frames as a starting point, the thesis examined the links between perspectives in the media and perceptions of the public and journalists. It was found that some frames are visible in all locations and stages of the communication process; they are visible in the media, they are recognisable in the minds of the audience and in the minds of journalists. They are, as it were, perpetuated stories. The main perpetuated story is that of poor governance; it is visible in all areas of communication.

However, two other stories do not revolve. The first is the victim story. It
is important in the media coverage and in public perception, but journalists have little affinity for it. The second story is that of the lack of progress in developing countries. It is propagated in the media and strongly felt by the public. Journalists, however, do know that there is a trend of slow progress in developing countries, which suggests that journalists have a different picture of the situation in developing countries than the audience – a picture that depends less strongly on perceptions of victims and stagnation. However, because media coverage is driven by current events and news values, this balanced view finds relatively little reflection in their articles.

**Recommendations for NGOs and newspapers**

The chapter concludes with recommendations for NGOs and newspapers. This is done from a normative point of departure; public commitment to poverty is important and the media can influence this involvement. The media narrative of the lack of progress can feed the perception that nothing has been achieved in reducing poverty and that efforts in this area have been meaningless. The same applies to the media coverage of local governance in developing countries. The endless repetition of messages about corrupt leaders can feed the perception of the public that development money lands in the wrong pockets.

NGOs are concerned about the decreasing involvement of the public. In that light, this study raises questions about their own communications. A first recommendation, especially to British NGOs, involves the use of pathetic images in fundraising campaigns. Apparently, British NGOs are convinced of the necessity of such images, but most Dutch and Flemish NGOs seemingly succeed in raising funds while using another type of imagery. Furthermore Dutch and Flemish NGOs should shift the focus of the discussion. This concerns the invisibility of local initiatives to combat poverty, for example, by teachers, entrepreneurs or health workers. They hardly come into view in public campaigns by NGOs, which feed the image that Western NGOs and donors solve all problems.

A second recommendation is to communicate more clearly about achievements. The continued focus on the needs that are still there reinforces the image that there is no progress in developing countries. This could undermine the credibility of NGOs’ work. Results should not only be visible on websites and in newsletters for their donors, but also in places where NGOs’ fundraising calls reach the public.

A third recommendation is to no longer shun discussions on corruption. The public has strong perceptions that developing money ends up in the wrong pockets, which undermines the reputation and credibility of NGOs. Their strategy of not talking about this issue so people will not think about it, is understandable. But the public perception will not change if NGOs leave this topic exclusively in the hands of the news media. They will have to develop and promote an alternative story.

To newspapers this study calls for a more constructive journalistic approach to reporting on developing countries. The basic principle of constructive journalism is that the media bear responsibility for the impact of their work. For instance, they should not only expose problems, but also present possible solutions. It also implies that the media should put forward a worldview that better reflects reality.

If the news media accept this principle of responsibility, their reports should have an additional focus. First, it would have to pay more attention to positive developments in the long term, such as the decline of extreme poverty and child mortality. Secondly, it should pay more attention to improving governance, peace and stability, or local initiatives that contribute to it. It involves a rethinking of what ‘news’ entails. New values are not set in stone; they are characteristics that people attribute to events. As long as news values, such as drama, conflict and bad news set the journalistic agenda, the media will continue to put forward a narrow picture of developing countries.
Nederlandse samenvatting

De media en publieke betrokkenheid bij armoede in ontwikkelingslanden

Armoede in ontwikkelingslanden is voor de meeste Europeanen een ver-van-mijn-bed show. Ze komen er in hun dagelijkse leven niet mee in aanraking en zijn er gemiddeld genomen ook niet buitengewoon geïnteresseerd. Het beeld dat ze van ontwikkelingslanden hebben is meestal ingekleurd door honger, ziekte, droogte en andere ellende. Veel mensen hebben bovendien twijfels over het nut van ontwikkelingsaanwerking: ze vinden dat we moeten helpen, maar ze denken tegelijkertijd dat het niet veel uitmaakt.

Deze studie wordt gedreven door zorgen over het draagvlak in Europa voor armoedebestrijding en internationale samenwerking. Het stelt vragen over percepties van ontwikkelingslanden die daaraan ten grondslag liggen en, meer specifiek, over de rol van de media in de beeldvorming van het publiek. Het hoofddoel van deze studie is om inzicht te krijgen in de huidige representatie van wereldwijde armoede en ontwikkelingsaanwerking in Europa.


Wie deze discussies volgt, kan gemakkelijk de conclusie trekken dat de media vooral stereotyperende ‘zielige beelden’ over mensen in ontwikkelingslanden verspreiden. Feitelijk is er echter weinig over de mediabeeldvorming bekend. Empirische studies zijn schaars en bovendien vaak beperkt tot specifieke onderwerpen, zoals de verslaglegging van een bepaalde hongersnood. Het doel van dit onderzoek is nu om de empirische kennis over de mediapresentatie van armoede in ontwikkelingslanden te vergroten.

Diverse soorten representaties zijn vaak of juist minder vaak zien. Daarnaast belicht deze studie de verhouding tussen mediabeeldvorming en de percepties van het publiek. Ten slotte onderzoekt het de percepties van journalisten die over armoede in ontwikkelingslanden berichten. De centrale onderzoeksvraag is:

Welke verhalen over armoede in ontwikkelingslanden worden in Europa verteld?

Verhalen over armoede komen op verschillende plekken tot leven. We zien ze in nieuwsberichten en in campagnes van ontwikkelingsorganisaties, ze zitten in de hoofden van mensen die berichten over ontwikkelingslanden maken en in de hoofden van gewone burgers. In vier opeenvolgende empirische hoofdstukken komt dit aan de orde. De studie vond plaats in drie landen: Engeland, Nederland en België. Belgische data beperken zich tot het Nederlandstalige Vlaanderen. De keuze voor drie landen maakt het mogelijk om gegevens te vergelijken en te zien in hoeverre ze landenpecifiek zijn. De studie richtte zich bovendien op zowel nieuwsmedia als uitingen van ngo’s, omdat het publiek beiden noemt als belangrijke afzenders van informatie over ontwikkelingslanden. De aandacht ging daarbij uit naar boodschappen waarmee mensen min of meer spontaan in aanraking komen, zoals krantenartikelen en campagnespots op televisie.

Als onderzoeksmethode is gekozen voor een framinganalyse. Frames zijn meta-communicatieve boodschappen die betekenis geven aan de wereld om ons heen. Elk frame bevat een aantal elementen: het definieert het probleem, het zegt iets over oorzaken, gevolgen en oplossingen, en het bevat een morele boodschap. Deze elementen hoeven niet in elke boodschap zichtbaar te zijn: wanneer we bijvoorbeeld worden geconfronteerd met beelden van hongerige mensen (slachtofferframe) dan begrijpen we vanzelf dat zij een moreel appel doen op onze hulp.

Framing gebeurt op verschillende momenten in het communicatieproces, en frames manifesteren zich op verschillende plekken. Ze borrelen op in het hoofd van de journalist die een artikel schrijft of de campagnemaker die een nieuwe advertentie bedenkt. Ze vinden hun weerslag in nieuwsberichten en campagnespots van ontwikkelingsorganisaties. En ze bereiken vervolgens lezers en kijkers, deze mediaframes mengen met hun al aanwezige kennis, ervaring en waardenpatroon. Het bovenstaande betekent dat frames niet gebonden zijn aan een individu. Ze ontstaan in een bredere maatschappelijke context en maken deel uit van het collectieve geheugen van een grote groep
mensen. Zowel zenders als ontvangers van frames putten uit ditzelfde reservoir van culturele frames wanneer ze een boodschap creëren of interpreteren.

De ideeënstrijd over armoede in ontwikkelingslanden

Het doel van hoofdstuk 2 is om de diversiteit aan armoedeframes in kaart te brengen. De deelvraag in dit hoofdstuk is: Welk frames worden gebruikt om verschillende standpunten over ontwikkelingsaanpak en -takkenwerking te verdedigen?

Het identificeren van frames gebeurt via een inductieve framinganalyse op basis van teksten en beelden die uitgesproken visies op armoede bevatten. Dat zijn bijvoorbeeld politieke partijprogramma’s, ngo-campagnes en de Bijbel. In dergelijke teksten is gezocht naar woorden, zinsneden en metaforen die de armoedekwestie definiëren, of die iets zeggen over oorzaken, gevolgen, oplossingen en morele verantwoordelijkheid. Het resultaat is een matrix met negen logische, van elkaar verschillende ‘verhalen’ over armoede. De validiteit en consistentie is getoetst aan de hand van een grotere dataset van ngo-advertenties en krantenartikelen.

Negen armoedeframes


Frame 5. Global Village. In een globaliserende wereld zijn alle landen en men-

sen met elkaar verbonden. Rijke en arme landen hebben een gezamenlijke verantwoordelijkheid voor het oplossen van grensoverschrijdende problemen, waarvan de armsten de zwaarste lasten dragen.


Frame 9. Chain of Being. Armoede is statisch. De wereld is gewoon zoals zij is; alles heeft zijn plek en de armen moeten accepteren wat hen overkomt in het leven. Armoede hoeft hen niet ongelukkig te maken, zolang ze hun lot maar aanvaarden.

Frames in de discussie over ontwikkelingssamenwerking

Het hoofdstuk onderzoekt vervolgens hoe deze frames worden ingezet in de discussie over ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Dat gebeurt via een analyse van ngo-advertenties en krantenartikelen over dit onderwerp. Twee hoofdvragen domineren de discussie. De eerste vraag is waarom we aan ontwikkelingssamenwerking moeten doen. De tweede vraag is of ontwikkelingssamenwerking effectief is. Zeven frames spelen een rol in één van deze discussies. In de eerste discussie verdedigen ngo’s het standpunt dat we een morele plicht hebben om iets te doen voor de ander. Dat doen ze via het slachtoffer- en sociale rechtvaardigheidsframe. Daar tegenover staan met name politici die het eigenbelang van ontwikkelingssamenwerking benadrukken, via het dreigend onheil frame (het gaat terrorisme en migratie tegen) en het ieder voor zich frame (het is goed voor ons bedrijfsleven). Het global village frame weet deze tegenstelling tussen ‘hun belang’ en ‘ons eigen belang’ te overbrugen, door te wijzen op het gemeenschappelijke belang van het aanpakken van grensoverschrijdende problemen.

Op zoek naar het zielige slachtoffer


Armoedeframes in ngo-campagnes en kranten

Geen enkel frame domineert de berichtgeving van wereldwijde armoede in de media. Voor kranten is het vooruitgangsframe het belangrijkst, gevolgd door het slachtoffer- en slecht bestuur frame. Voor ngo’s is het slachtoffer-frame het belangrijkst, gevolgd door het sociale rechtvaardigheid- en het vooruitgangsframe (zie Figuur 3.3 en 3.4). Er is een opvallend verschil tussen Engeland enerzijds en Nederland en Vlaanderen anderzijds: Britse ngo-reclames werden duidelijk gedomineerd door het slachtofferframe (78%); ze gebruikten het frame twee keer zo vaak als Nederlandse en Vlaamse ngo’s.

Het hoofdstuk sluit vervolgens aan bij de kritiek op ‘problematiserende’ voorstellingen van mensen in ontwikkelingslanden. Daartoe kijkt het specifiek naar kranten foto’s en beeldmateriaal van de ngo’s. De belangrijkste bevinding is dat de media ons niet overspoelen met expliciete ‘zielige slachtoffer-beelden’ van lijdende en hongerende mensen (zie Figuur 3.5). Nieuwsmedia in de drie landen gebruiken dergelijke beelden maar weinig (NL en EN: 9%, VL: 12%) en dat zelfde geldt voor Nederlandse en Vlaamse ngo’s (resp. 14% en 10%). Britse ngo’s zijn echter een uitzondering: een derde (34%) van hun visuele materiaal bevat expliciete ‘zielige slachtofferbeelden’.

Tegelijkertijd blijkt dat (mensen uit) ontwikkelingslanden voornamelijk worden geportretteerd als afhankelijk van hulp of interventie van buitenaf. Vooral ngo’s verspreiden dit beeld, doordat ze weinig het eigen initiatief van mensen en organisaties in ontwikkelingslanden laten zien. De meerderheid van de advertenties benadrukt uitsluitend dat de buitenlandse hulporganisatie, of de Westerse donor, in actie komt of moet komen. Het lokale initiatief is in Britse campagnes nog minder te zien dan in Nederlandse en Vlaamse.

In dit hoofdstuk sluit vervolgens aan bij de kritiek op ‘problematiserende’ beelden en de suggestie te wekken dat mensen afhankelijk zijn en niet op eigen kracht vooruitkomen.

Mediaframes en publieke percepties van armoede in ontwikkelingslanden: is er een link?

Dit hoofdstuk legt een link tussen de mediarepresentatie van armoede in ontwikkelingslanden en de publieke opinie over dit onderwerp. Engeland dient daarbij als casus. De deelvraag is: Hoe verhoudt het overkoepelende narratief over armoede in ontwikkelingslanden in de Engelse media zich tot het overkoepelende narratief van het Engelse publiek? Het onderzoek bestaat uit een framing- en inhoudsanalyse van mediaberichten (krantenartikelen en ngo-advertenties), waarvoor dezelfde dataset is gebruikt als in het vorige hoofdstuk. Daarnaast zijn negen publieke-opinieonderzoeken uit dezelfde periode geanalyseerd. Zowel in de mediaberichten als opinieonderzoeken is gekeken naar de framing en naar de tone of voice: de mate waarin het mediabericht of het publiek de nadruk legt op negatieve of op positieve ontwikkelingen.

Uit de analyse van mediaberichten komen drie verhaallijnen bovendrijven. Ten eerste framendeg media armoede vooral als een kwestie van ‘slachtoffers’, ‘gebrek aan ontwikkeling’ en ‘slecht bestuur’; ten tweede leggen mediabe-
richten de oorzaken van armoede vooral in ontwikkelingslanden zelf, terwijl de oplossing vooral van buiten moet komen; en ten derde suggereren de mediaberichten - door hun grote nadruk op problemen, crises en corruptie - dat er geen vooruitgang en goed bestuur is in ontwikkelingslanden.

Dit media-narratief is vergeleken met terugkerende en dominante thema's, opmerkingen en antwoorden in de publieke-opinieonderzoeken. Er bestaan grote overeenkomsten. Net als de media beschouwt het publiek armoede in hoofdzaak als een lokaal probleem, dat wordt gekenmerkt door ellendige omstandigheden en gebrek aan ontwikkeling. Het publiek is bovendien overtuigd dat armoede de afgelopen decennia even erg is gebleven of erger is geworden. Dit komt overeen met de geringe aandacht in de media voor vooruitgang in ontwikkelingslanden. De publieke percepties van corruptie en disfunctionerende overheden in ontwikkelingslanden zijn sterk, wat eveneens spoort met de nadruk die kranten leggen op slecht bestuur in ontwikkelingslanden. Zowel in de media als bij het publiek krijgt het perspectief van sociale rechtvaardigheid weinig aandacht, en dat geldt eveneens voor de rol van Westerse bedrijven en organisaties in het ontstaan of voortduren van armoede.

Het onderzoek geeft geen uitsluitend positie over de vraag in hoeverre mediaberichten de publieke opinie beïnvloeden, en omgekeerd. Het stelt echter dat er een duidelijke wisselwerking is tussen media en publiek, en het suggereert dat de media een sterke kracht zijn in deze wisselwerking. Een aanwijzing daarvoor is dat het publiek zelf zegt dat dit het geval is, en regelmaats terug verwijst naar de invloed van de media op hun beeld van de situatie in ontwikkelingslanden. Een tweede aanwijzing is dat het publiek de meeste affiniteit met het slachtofferframe (43%), de schuldigheidsframe en het vooruitgangsframe. Respectievelijk 98%, 85% en 82% van de deelnemers geeft aan dat dit perspectief helemaal of enigszins past bij hun persoonlijke visie op armoede. De minste affiniteit voelen ze met het slachtofferframe. Deze journalistenframes houden echter nauwelijks verband met de frames in hun artikelen. Alleen de weinige journalisten met een voorkeur voor het slachtofferframe gebruiken dit frame ook iets vaker dan verwacht in hun artikelen. Voor de overige frames geldt dat de persoonlijke percepties van journalisten niet voorspellen hoe zij hun artikelen framen.

Journalisten antwoorden daaraan op de vraag of andere factoren de framing van hun artikelen bepalen: nieuwswaarde, verwachtingen van lezers, profiel van het medium, bronnen, en beschikbare tijd en geld. Volgens de journalisten zijn vooral nieuwswaarde en bronnen van invloed op de gekozen invalshoek. Collega’s op de redactie spelen volgens de journalisten geen grote rol. Slechts 15 procent noemt hun invloed tamelijk belangrijk, en geen van de journalisten vond de invloed van collega’s groot. Dit wordt gereflecteerd in hoge percepties van autonomie: deelnemers stellen dat hun autonomie zeer groot (49%) of tamelijk groot (47%) is tijdens het schrijven van artikelen over dit onderwerp.

**Conclusies en discussie**

Dit laatste hoofdstuk keert terug naar de hoofdvraag: welke verhalen over armoede worden in Europa verteld? Het begint met een reflectie op de mediaberichtgeving en het brengt deze in verband met de discussie over probleematiserende beelden en het koloniale discours. Vervolgens reflecteert het
op de wisselwerking tussen media, journalisten en publiek. Het eindigt met aanbevelingen voor ngo's en journalisten.

Armoede in de media: slachtoffers, stagnatie, slecht bestuur en sociale rechtvaardigheid

Twee frames zijn zowel voor kranten als voor ngo's van belang bij het beschrijven van het armoedeprobleem. Het eerste is het vooruitgangsframe, dat armoede defineert als achterblijvende ontwikkeling. Het tweede is het slachtofferframe, dat de nadruk legt op ontberingen en tragische omstandigheden. Bij kranten is daarnaast het slecht bestuur-frame relevant, terwijl ngo's het perspectief van sociale rechtvaardigheid belichten. De overige frames krijgen minder aandacht. Zo wordt armoede relatief weinig beschreven als een probleem waarin het Westen een aandeel in heeft: frames die de wisselwerking tussen het Westen en het Zuiden benadrukken ('onze schuld, global village) ontbreken grotendeels, en datzelfde geldt voor het frame dat armoede beschouwt als een gevaar voor het Westen (dreigend onheil).

De oorzaak van het armoedeprobleem wordt in de media vooral in ontwikkelingslanden zelf gelegd. Zowel kranten als ngo's suggereren dat armoede een lokaal probleem is, veroorzaakt of verergerd door bijvoorbeeld slecht bestuur, oorlog of natuurrampen. Westerse politieke beslissingen of consumptiepatronen worden weinig in verband gebracht met armoede in ontwikkelingslanden. Wat betreft de oplossing vertellen de media echter een ander verhaal: deze moet voor een belangrijk deel van het Westen of van de internationale gemeenschap komen. Kranten en ngo's suggereren bijvoorbeeld dat Westerse overheden, instituties en donoren ontwikkelingshulp moeten geven, of dat de internationale gemeenschap de gevolgen van klimaatverandering moet aanpakken. Locale overheden ontbreken in de oplossing vrijwel volledig.

Discussies over het koloniale discours en over ‘zielige beelden’ zijn niet voorbij


Evenmin voorbij is de discussie over expliciete ‘zielige beelden’ van mensen in ontwikkelingslanden in campagnes van ontwikkelingsorganisaties.
Aan de ene kant staan kritische actiegroepen die ze onethisch vinden; aan de andere kant ngo's die zich beroepen op de noodzaak van dit soort beelden om fondsen te werven. Dit onderzoek kan deze impasse niet doorbreken. Het reikt weliswaar alternatieven aan voor het slachtofferframe, maar het geeft geen antwoord op de vraag hoe ngo's daarmee fondsen kunnen werven. Het onderzoek suggereert echter dat de discussie een nieuwe impuls zou kunnen krijgen door andere vragen te stellen. Niet: ‘welk frame levert het meeste geld op?’ Maar: ‘Hoe kunnen ngo’s fondsen werven zonder het beeld van eeuwijdurende ellende en afhankelijkheid in ontwikkelingslanden te voeden?’

Rondzingerende verhalen over armoede
Met de mediaframes als vertrekpunt onderzocht dit proefschrift de verbanden tussen perspectieven in de media en percepties van het publiek en journalisten. Het viel op dat sommige frames zichtbaar zijn op alle plekken en in alle stadia van het communicatieproces: ze zijn zichtbaar in de media, ze zijn te herkennen in de hoofden van het publiek en in de hoofden van journalisten. Het zijn als het ware rondzingerende verhalen. Het belangrijkste rondzingerende verhaal is dat van slecht bestuur: het is zichtbaar in alle delen van het communicatieproces.


Aanbevelingen voor ngo’s en kranten
Het hoofdstuk eindigt met aanbevelingen voor ngo’s en kranten. Het gebeurt vanuit een normatief vertrekpunt: publieke betrokkenheid bij armoede is belangrijk en de media kunnen deze betrokkenheid bevloeden. Het medianarratief van gebrek aan vooruitgang kan het beeld voeden dat er niets is bereikt in het terugdringen van armoede en dat inspanningen op dit vlak zinloos zijn geweest. Datzelfde geldt voor de mediaberichtgeving over lokaal bestuur in ontwikkelingslanden. De eindeloze herhaling van berichten over corrupte leiders kunnen de perceptie van het publiek voeden dat ontwikkelingsgeld meestal in verkeerde zakken belandt. Ngo’s maken zich zorgen over de afnemende betrokkenheid van het publiek. In dat licht roept dit onderzoek vragen op over hun eigen communicatie. Een eerste aanbeveling, vooral aan Britse ngo’s, betreft het gebruik van zielige beelden in fondswervende campagnes. Kennelijk zijn Britse ngo’s overtijd van de noodzaak van dit soort beelden, maar kennelijk lukt het Nederlandse en Vlaamse ngo’s om ook met ander beeldgebruik fondsen te werven. Bij Nederlandse en Vlaamse ngo’s moet eerder een andere discussie worden gevoerd. Hier gaat het over de onzichtbaarheid van lokaal initiatief om de armoede te bestrijden, bijvoorbeeld door onderwijzers, ondernemers of gezondheidswerkers. Zij komen nauwelijks in beeld in publiekscampagnes van ngo’s, waarmee het beeld wordt gevoed dat Westerse ngo’s en donateurs alle problemen oplossen.

Een tweede aanbeveling is om veel duidelijker te communiceren over behaalde resultaten. De voortdurende nadruk op de noden die er nog zijn, versterkt het beeld dat er geen vooruitgang is. Dat kan de geloofwaardigheid van het werk van ngo’s ondermijnen. Resultaten moeten niet alleen zichtbaar zijn op websites en in nieuwsbrieven voor de eigen achterban, maar juist ook op de plekken waar ngo’s met fondswervende oproepen het grote publiek bereiken.

Een derde aanbeveling is om de discussie over corruptie niet langer te schuwen. Het publiek heeft sterke percepties dat ontwikkelingsgeld in verkeerde zakken belandt. Dat ondermijnt de reputatie en geloofwaardigheid van ngo’s. Hun strategie om niet over dit onderwerp te praten, zodat mensen er niet aan zullen denken, is begrijpelijk. Maar de publieke perceptie zal niet veranderen wanneer ngo’s dit onderwerp exclusief in handen laten van de nieuwsmedia. Zij zullen zelf een alternatief verhaal moeten ontwikkelen en uitdragen.

Aan kranten doet dit onderzoek een oproep tot een meer constructief-journalistieke benadering in de berichtgeving over ontwikkelingslanden. Kern van constructieve journalistiek is dat media verantwoordelijkheid dragen voor de impact van hun werk. Daarbij hoort bijvoorbeeld dat ze niet alleen problemen aan de kaak stellen, maar ook mogelijke oplossingen in beeld brengen. Daarbij hoort ook dat media een wereldbeeld neerzetten dat de werkelijkheid beter weerspiegelt.

Wanneer nieuwsmedia dit principe van verantwoordelijkheid accepteren,
dan zou hun berichtgeving een extra focus moeten hebben. Het zou ten eerste meer aandacht moeten schenken aan positieve ontwikkelingen op de lange termijn, zoals daling van extreme armoede en kindersterfte. En ten tweede zou het meer aandacht moeten schenken aan verbeterend bestuur, vrede en stabiliteit, of lokale initiatieven die daaraan bijdragen. Dat gaat gepaard met een heroverweging van wat ‘nieuws’ is. Nieuwswaarden zijn niet in steen gebied, het zijn karakteristieken die door mensen aan gebeurtenissen worden toegekend. Zolang nieuwswaarden als drama, conflict en slecht nieuws de journalistieke agenda bepalen, zullen de media een beperkt beeld van ontwikkelingslanden blijven verspreiden.

Mirjam Vossen (1965) studied Journalism (Fontys Academy in Tilburg) and holds a master degree in International Development Studies (Utrecht University). As a freelance journalist and lecturer, she specialised in global poverty and development cooperation. She regularly visits developing countries and occasionally lives in Malawi. In January 2013, she started her PhD research at the Radboud University in Nijmegen and the University of Leuven. She frequently shared the results of her studies with NGOs, citizen initiatives and media workers. In addition, she wrote background articles, blogs and opinion pieces about the impact of media framing for various media. She currently works as a media researcher and as an advisor for World’s Best News, a movement that draws attention to progress in developing countries.
Famines, drought, corruption and pot-bellied children. Such images usually come to mind when people think about poverty in developing countries. When asked, many say that this is what the media tell them. But is that true?

This study by journalist and development expert Mirjam Vossen investigates the representation of global poverty in Europe. It explores how poverty is framed in newspapers and advertisements of development organisations, and how these frames relate to people’s perceptions of the issue.

The findings challenge the assumption that the media overwhelm us with pathetic images of the stereotypical ‘hungry child’. However, the findings also demonstrate that the media strongly emphasize the problems and stagnation in developing countries and that they pay little attention to the tremendous progress in poverty reduction. Hence, the study provides a critical reflection on the media’s responsibility for popular perceptions of the developing world.